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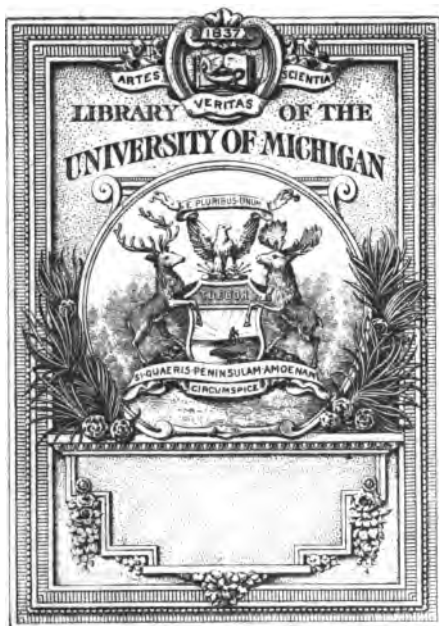
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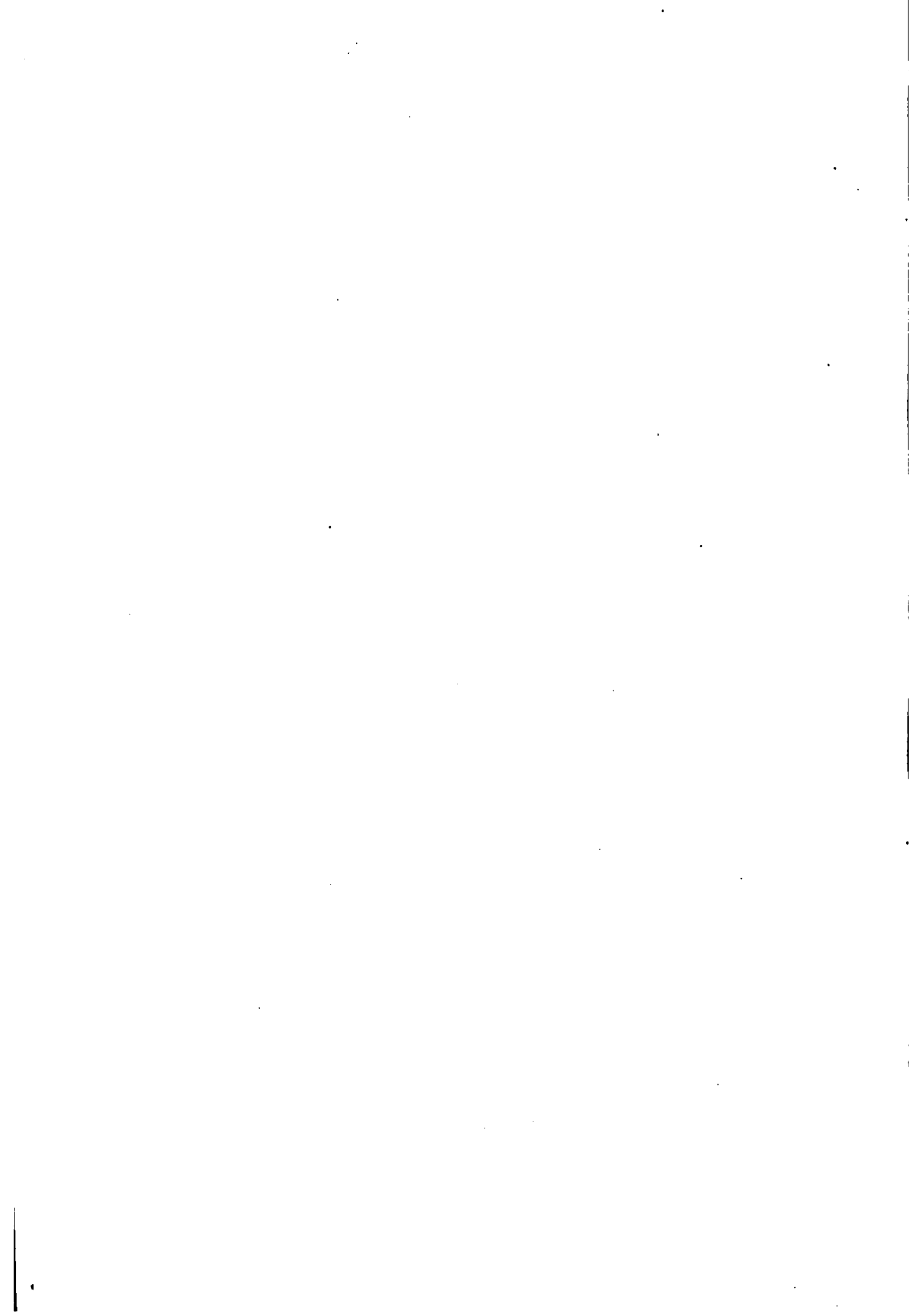
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STANDARD LITERATURE SERIES

THE STORY OF
LITTLE NELL

FROM OLD CURIOSITY SHOP

BY
CHARLES DICKENS

WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

UNIVERSITY PUBLISHING COMPANY
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INTRODUCTION.

CHARLES DICKENS was born near Portsmouth, England, February 7, 1812. He early developed a fondness for reading, and when only nine years old had read "Don Quixote," "Gil Blas," "Robinson Crusoe," and several of the early English novels.

When he was ten, his father, who was a clerk in the Navy, lost his employment, and was imprisoned for debt. The boy was placed in a blacking factory, where he pasted labels on the bottles of blacking. After a time his father, released from prison, secured an engagement as reporter on the "Morning Herald," and Charles was again sent to school. A few years later he entered a lawyer's office as clerk, but he had no taste for this work, and taught himself shorthand, with the idea of becoming a journalist. At the age of seventeen he became a reporter at Doctors' Commons, a court building of London, and at twenty-two he was employed as reporter on the staff of the London "Morning Chronicle." His work required him to travel all over England, collecting items of news and writing up such incidents as are now telegraphed to the papers daily by local reporters. As there were no railroads at the time, he went by stage-coach from place to place, and in this way he mingled with the people and saw every phase of life. While thus engaged he began to contribute original papers, under the signature "Boz," to the "Evening Chronicle." They were afterwards collected and published separately as "Sketches by Boz." In 1836 the "Pickwick Papers" appeared. These brought him fame and fortune, and he soon became the most popular writer of English fiction.

The events and surroundings of Dickens's own early life, the people he met, and the places he visited as a reporter, constantly appear in his novels and stories. It was at Camden Town, for instance, while he worked in the blacking factory, that he lived with an old lady who took children to board, and who, he afterwards said, was the original of Mrs. Pipechin in "Dombey and Son."

The most striking feature of Dickens as an author is the skill with which he seizes upon some peculiar trait or quality in one of the persons of his story, exaggerates it, and keeps it before his reader until all other traits and qualities are forgotten, and that character becomes the very personification of that one quality. This is called caricaturing, and

Dickens was such a master of the art, that the very names of his leading characters have become a part of our language, and stand as synonyms for their respective peculiarities. We can to-day give no better idea of a miser than to call him a Scrooge, or of a hard master than to call him a Tackleton.

Nearly all Dickens's novels were written with some distinct good purpose. In "Dombey and Son" the pride and selfishness of old London merchants are depicted; "Oliver Twist" exposed the practice of training boys to commit crime; "Nicholas Nickleby" called attention to the cruel treatment of boys in cheap boarding-schools; "Hard Times" showed the sufferings of the factory hands; "Bleak House" pictured the position of wards in Chancery and the slow process of law in England at that time; "Little Dorrit" showed the horrors of the debtors' prisons. "David Copperfield" is supposed to refer in some parts to his own life.

Dickens loved to write about children, and of all his child-characters there are none so beautiful, so noble, so affecting as Little Nell, as we see her in "Old Curiosity Shop." Her gentleness, her kind and loving nature, her devotion to her grandfather, her wonderful patience in her many sufferings—these have excited the admiration of all readers of Dickens. The story of her death, and of the old man's grief and loneliness until he was laid to rest by her side, is perhaps the most pathetic writing in the English language. Few can read it without being moved to tears.

Dickens visited America first in 1842, and upon his return wrote "American Notes" and "Martin Chuzzlewit." His sarcasm and the severity with which in these two books he caricatured the people he met excited indignation among Americans. This feeling gradually passed away, however, and in 1868, upon his second visit, he was cordially received in all the larger cities of the United States. He read selections from his own works, and crowds came to hear him.

In England he was universally popular. The queen offered him a title of nobility, but he declined it, saying that he wished to be remembered by no other name than Charles Dickens. He continued to write until the very day of his death, and left unfinished "The Mystery of Edwin Drood," which promised to be one of his best novels. He died suddenly on the 8th of June, 1870, and the nation paid him homage by burying him in the Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey.

LITTLE NELL.

CHAPTER I.

NELL AND HER GRANDFATHER.

ALTHOUGH I am an old man, night is generally my time for walking. In the summer I often leave home early in the morning and roam about the fields and lanes all day, or even escape for days or weeks together; but, saving in the country, I seldom go out until after dark, though, Heaven be thanked, I love its light, and feel the cheerfulness it sheds upon the earth, as much as any creature living.

One night I had roamed into the city,¹ and was walking slowly on in my usual way, when I was arrested by an inquiry, which seemed to be addressed to myself, and in a soft, sweet voice that struck me very pleasantly. I turned hastily around and found at my elbow a pretty little girl, who begged to be directed to a certain street in quite another quarter of the town.

"It is a very long way from here," said I, "my child."

"I know that, sir," she replied, timidly, "for I came from there to-night."

"Alone?" said I in some surprise.

"Oh, yes; I don't mind that; but I am a little frightened now, for I have lost my road."

"Come," said I, "I'll take you there."

She put her hand in mine as confidently as if she had known

¹ London, England.

me from her cradle, and we trudged away together. Though more scantily attired than she might have been, she was dressed with perfect neatness, and betrayed no marks of poverty or neglect.

“Who has sent you so far by yourself?” said I.

“Somebody who is very kind to me, sir.”

“And what have you been doing?”

“That I must not tell,” said the child.

There was something in the manner of this reply which caused me to look at the little creature with an expression of surprise. Her quick eye seemed to read my thoughts. She added that there was no harm in what she had been doing, but it was a great secret—a secret which she did not even know herself.

There was no reason, however, why I should refrain from seeing the person who had sent her to so great a distance by night and alone; and, as it was not improbable that if she found herself near home she might take farewell of me and deprive me of the opportunity, I avoided the most frequented ways and took the most intricate. Thus it was not until we arrived in the street itself that she knew where we were. Clapping her hands with pleasure, and running on before me for a short distance, my little acquaintance stopped at a door, and remaining on the step till I came up, knocked at it when I joined her.

A part of this door was of glass, unprotected by any shutter, which I did not observe at first, for all was very dark and silent within, and I was anxious for an answer to her summons. When she had knocked twice or thrice, there was a noise as if some person were moving inside, and at length a faint light appeared through the glass which, as it approached very slowly, enabled me to see, both what kind of person it was who advanced, and what kind of place it was through which he came.

He was a little old man, with long, gray hair, whose face

and figure, as he held the light above his head and looked before him as he approached, I could plainly see. The place through which he made his way was one of those receptacles for old and curious things¹ which seem to crouch in odd corners of this town, and to hide their musty treasures from the public eye in jealousy and distrust. There were rusty weapons of various kinds; distorted figures in china, and wood, and iron, and ivory, and strange furniture that might have been designed in dreams. The haggard aspect of the little old man was wonderfully suited to the place.

As he turned the key in the lock, he surveyed me with some astonishment, which was not diminished when he looked from me to my companion. The door being opened, the child addressed him as her grandfather, and told him the story of our companionship.

"Why, bless thee, child," said the old man, patting her on the head, "how couldst thou miss thy way? What if I had lost thee, Nell!"

"I would have found my way back to you, grandfather," said the child, boldly; "never fear."

The old man kissed her, then turned to me and begged me to walk in. I did so. The door was closed and locked. Preceding me with the light, he led me into a small sitting-room in which was another door opening into a kind of closet, where I saw a little bed that a fairy might have slept in, it looked so very small, and was so prettily arranged. The child took a candle and tripped into this little room, leaving the old man and me together.

"You must be tired, sir," said he, as he placed a chair near the fire. "How can I thank you?"

"By taking more care of your grandchild another time, my good friend," I replied.

"More care!" said the old man in a shrill voice; "more care of Nelly! Why, who ever loved a child as I love Nell?"

¹ stores where old and odd articles of past times and strange countries can be purchased.

"I don't think you consider—" I began.

"I don't consider!" cried the old man, interrupting me; "I don't consider her? Ah, how little you know of the truth! Little Nelly! little Nelly!"

It would be impossible for any man to express more affection than the dealer in curiosities did, in these four words. I waited for him to speak again, but he rested his chin upon his hand, and, shaking his head twice or thrice, fixed his eyes upon the fire.

While we were sitting thus in silence, the door of the closet opened, and the child returned, her light-brown hair hanging loose about her neck, and her face flushed with the haste she had made to rejoin us. She busied herself immediately in preparing supper. I was surprised to see that everything was done by the child, and that there appeared to be no other persons but ourselves in the house. I took advantage of a moment when she was absent to venture a hint on this point, to which the old man replied that there were few grown persons as trustworthy or as careful as she.

"She is not my child, sir," said he. "Her mother was, and she is poor. I save nothing—not a penny—though I live as you see; but"—he laid his hand upon my arm and leaned forward to whisper—"she shall be rich one of these days, and a fine lady. Don't you think ill of me because I use her help."

At this juncture, the subject of our conversation again returned, and the old man, motioning to me to approach the table, broke off and said no more.

We had scarcely begun our repast when there was a knock at the door by which I had entered, and Nell, bursting into a hearty laugh, said it was no doubt dear old Kit come back at last.

"Foolish Nell!" said the old man, fondling with her hair. "She always laughs at poor Kit." The old man took up a candle and went to open the door. When he came back, Kit was at his heels.

Kit was a shambling,¹ awkward lad, with an uncommonly wide mouth, very red cheeks, a turned-up nose, and certainly the most comical expression of face I ever saw. He stopped short at the door on seeing a stranger, and stood looking into the parlor with the most extraordinary leer I ever beheld. He had a remarkable manner of standing sideways as he spoke, and thrusting his head forward over his shoulder. I think he would have amused one anywhere, but the child's enjoyment of his oddity, and the relief it was to find that there was some merriment in a place that appeared so unsuited to her, was quite irresistible. Kit himself burst into a loud roar, and stood with his mouth wide open and his eyes nearly shut, laughing violently.

The old man took no notice of what passed; but I remarked that when her laugh was over, the child's bright eyes were dimmed with tears, called forth by the fulness of heart with which she welcomed her uncouth favorite after the little anxiety of the night. As for Kit, he carried a large slice of bread and meat into a corner, and applied himself to disposing of them with great voracity.

"Ah!" said the old man, turning to me with a sigh, as if I had spoken to him but that moment, "you don't know what you say, when you tell me that I don't consider her. Come hither, Nell."

The little girl hastened from her seat, and put her arm about his neck.

"Do I love thee, Nell?" said he. "Say, do I love thee, Nell, or no?"

"Indeed, indeed you do," replied the child, with great earnestness.

"She is poor now," said the old man, patting the child's neck, "but I say again, the time is coming when she shall be rich. It has been a long time coming, but it must come at last—a very long time, but it surely must come."

¹ clumsy.

"I am very happy as I am, grandfather," said the child.

"Tush, tush!" returned the old man, "thou dost not know—how shouldst thou?" Then he muttered again between his teeth, "The time must come. I am very sure it must. It will be all the better for coming late." By this time it wanted but a few minutes of midnight, and I rose to go; which recalled him to himself.

"One moment, sir," he said. "Now, Kit—near midnight, boy, and you still here! Get home, get home, and be true to your time in the morning, for there's work to do. Good-night. There, bid him good-night, Nell, and let him be gone."

"Good-night, Kit," said the child, her eyes lighting up with merriment and kindness.

Once more opening his mouth and shutting his eyes, and laughing like a stentor,¹ Kit gradually backed to the door and roared himself out. I turned to put on an outer coat which I had thrown off on entering the room, purposing to say no more. I was surprised to see the child standing patiently by, with a cloak upon her arm, and in her hand a hat and stick.

"Those are not mine, my dear," said I.

"No," returned the child, quietly, "they are grandfather's."

"But he is not going out to-night."

"Oh, yes, he is," said the child, with a smile.

"And what becomes of you, my pretty one?"

"Me! I stay here, of course. I always do."

I looked in astonishment toward the old man; but he was, or feigned to be, busied in the arrangement of his dress. From him I looked back to the slight, gentle figure of the child. Alone! In that gloomy place all the long, dreary night! She cheerfully helped the old man with his cloak, and, when he was ready, took a candle to light us out.

¹ laughing very loudly; Stentor was a man of ancient Greece who had a very loud voice; hence the name is sometimes used in reference to a person who has a powerful or a very loud voice.

When we reached the door, the child, setting down the candle, turned to say good-night, and raised her face to kiss me. Then she ran to the old man, who folded her in his arms and bade God bless her.

"Sleep soundly, Nell," he said in a low voice, "and angels guard thy bed! Do not forget thy prayers, my sweet."

The child opened the door, and with another farewell held it until we passed out. The old man paused a moment while it was gently closed and fastened on the inside, and satisfied that this was done, walked on at a slow pace. At the street corner he stopped. Regarding me with a troubled countenance, he said that our ways were widely different, and that he must take his leave. I would have spoken, but summoning up more alacrity than might have been expected in one of his appearance, he hurried away.

CHAPTER II.

THE DWARF.

AFTER combating, for nearly a week, the feeling which impelled me to revisit the place I had quitted under the circumstances already detailed, I yielded to it at length; and determined that this time I would present myself by the light of day, bent my steps thither early in the afternoon, and I soon found myself in the Curiosity Dealer's warehouse.

The old man and another person were together in the back part, and there seemed to have been high words between them, for their voices, which were raised on a very loud pitch, suddenly stopped on my entering, and the old man advancing hastily toward me, said that he was very glad I had come.

"You interrupted us at a critical moment," he said, pointing to the man whom I had found in company with him; "this fellow will murder me one of these days. He would have done so long ago, if he had dared."

"Bah! You would swear away my life if you could," returned the other. "But neither oaths, nor prayers, nor words *will* kill me, and therefore I live, and mean to live."

"And his mother died!" cried the old man, passionately clasping his hands and looking upward; "and this is Heaven's justice!"

The other stood lounging with his foot upon a chair. He was a young man of one-and-twenty or thereabouts; well made and certainly handsome, though having a dissipated, insolent air which repelled one.

"Justice or no justice," said the young fellow, "here I am and here I shall stop till such time as I think fit to go. I tell you again that I want to see my sister."

"*Your* sister!" said the old man, bitterly.

"Ah! You can't change the relationship."

"Why do you hunt and persecute me? God help me!" said the old man. "How often am I to tell you that my life is one of care and self-denial, and that I am poor? Leave Nell and I to toil and work."

"Nell will be a woman soon," returned the other, "and she'll forget her brother unless he shows himself sometimes."

"Take care," said the old man, with sparkling eyes, "that she does not forget you when you would have her memory keenest. Take care that the day don't come when you walk barefoot in the streets, and she rides by in a gay carriage of her own."

"You mean when she has your money?" retorted the other. "How like a poor man he talks!"

"And yet," said the old man, dropping his voice and speaking like one who thinks aloud, "how poor we are, and what a life it is! The cause is a young child's, guiltless of all harm or wrong, but nothing goes well with it! Hope and patience, hope and patience!"

These words were uttered in too low a tone to reach the ears of the young man. After a while the door opened, and the

child herself appeared, closely followed by an elderly man of remarkably hard features and forbidding aspect, and so low in stature as to be quite a dwarf, though his head and face were large enough for the body of a giant. His black eyes were restless, sly, and cunning, his mouth and chin bristly with a coarse, hard beard; and his complexion was one of that kind which never looks clean or wholesome. His hands, which were of a rough, coarse grain, were very dirty, and his fingernails were crooked, long, and yellow.

The child advanced timidly toward her brother and put her hand in his; the dwarf glanced keenly at all present, and the Curiosity Dealer, who plainly had not expected his uncouth visitor, seemed disconcerted and embarrassed.

"Ah!" said the dwarf, who had been surveying the young man attentively, "that should be your grandson, neighbor!"

"Say rather that he should not be," replied the old man. "But he is."

"And that?" inquired the dwarf, wheeling round and pointing straight at me.

"A gentleman who was so good as to bring Nell home the other night when she lost her way, coming from your house."

The little man turned to the child as if to chide her or express his wonder, but, as she was talking to the young man, he held his peace, and bent his head to listen.

"Well, Nelly," said the young fellow aloud. "Do they teach you to hate me, eh?"

"No, no. For shame! Oh, no! They never speak to me about you. But I love you dearly, Fred," said the child. "I do indeed, and always will. But, oh! if you would leave off vexing him and making him unhappy, then I could love you more."

"I see!" said the young man, as he stooped carelessly over the child, and having kissed her, pushed her from him. "There—get you away now you have said your lesson."

He remained silent, following her with his eyes, until she

had gained her little room and closed the door; and then, turning to the dwarf, said abruptly:

"Harkee, Mr. ——"

"Meaning me?" returned the dwarf. "Quilp is my name. You might remember. It's not a long one—Daniel Quilp."

"Harkee, Mr. Quilp, then," pursued the other. "You have some influence with my grandfather there. Then let me tell him once for all, through you, that I will come into this place as often as I like, so long as he keeps Nell here. He'll tell you that I care no more for Nell, for her own sake, than I do for him. Let him say so. I care for the whim, then, of coming to and fro, and reminding her of my existence. I will see her when I please. That's my point. I said I would stop till I had gained it. I have done so, and now my visit's ended."

"Humph!" said the dwarf, with a sour look and a shrug of his shoulders, "so much for dear relations. Thank God I acknowledge none! And so, neighbor, I'll turn my face homeward, leaving my love for Nelly, and hoping she may never lose her way again, though her doing so *has* procured me an honor I didn't expect." With that he bowed and leered at me, and went his way. Nell joined us before long, and bringing some needle-work to the table, sat by the old man's side.

"I'll be of better cheer, Nell," he said; "there must be good fortune in store for thee—I do not ask it for myself, but thee. When I think of the many years—many in thy short life—that thou hast lived alone with me, knowing no companions of thy own age nor any childish pleasures, I sometimes fear I have dealt hardly by thee, Nell. Not in intention; no, no. I have ever looked forward to the time that should enable thee to mix among the gayest and prettiest, and take thy station with the best. But I still look forward, Nell, I still look forward. And if I should be forced to leave thee, meanwhile, how have I fitted thee for struggles with the world? The poor bird yonder is as well qualified to encounter it, and be turned

adrift upon its mercies— Hark! I hear Kit outside. Go to him, Nell, go to him.”

She rose, and hurrying away, stopped, returned back, and put her arms about the old man's neck, then left him and hurried away again—but faster this time, to hide her falling tears.

And now that I have carried this history so far in my own character and introduced these personages to the reader, I shall for the convenience of the narrative detach myself from its further course, and leave those who have prominent and necessary parts in it to speak and act for themselves.

CHAPTER III.

MR. QUILP IN HIS OFFICE.

MR. QUILP could scarcely be said to be of any particular trade or calling, though his pursuits were diversified and his occupations numerous. He collected the rents of whole colonies of filthy streets and alleys by the water-side, advanced money to the seamen and petty officers of merchant vessels, had a share in the ventures of divers mates of East Indiamen,¹ and made appointments on Change² with men in glazed hats and round jackets pretty well every day. On the Surrey side³ of the river was a small rat-infested, dreary yard, called “Quilp's Wharf,” in which were a little wooden counting-house burrowing in the dust as if it had fallen from the clouds and plowed into the ground; a few fragments of rusty anchors; several large iron rings; some piles of rotten wood, and two or three heaps of old sheet copper, crumpled, cracked, and battered.

The day after the events related in the last chapter Mr. Quilp left his residence on Tower Hill and betook himself to the river-side, where he took boat for the wharf on which he

¹ ships sailing between England and the East Indies.

² the Exchange, a place where merchants and others meet to transact business.

³ south side of the Thames, the river which flows through London.

had bestowed his name. It was flood-tide when he sat down in the wherry to cross to the opposite shore. A fleet of barges were coming lazily on, some sideways, some head first, some stern first; all in a wrong-headed, dogged, obstinate way, bumping up against the larger craft, running under the bows of steam-boats, getting into every kind of nook and corner where they had no business, and being crushed on all sides like so many walnut shells; while each, with its pair of long sweeps struggling and splashing in the water, looked like some lumbering fish in pain. Quilp caused himself to be put ashore hard by the wharf, and proceeded thither, through a narrow lane which had as much water as mud in its composition, and a very liberal supply of both.

Arrived at his destination, the first object that presented itself to his view was a boy, who, being of an eccentric spirit and having a natural taste for tumbling, was now standing on his head and contemplating the aspect of the river under these uncommon circumstances. He was speedily brought on his heels by the sound of his master's voice, and as soon as his head was in its right position, Mr. Quilp, to speak expressively in the absence of a better verb, "punched it" for him.

"Come, you let me alone," said the boy, parrying Quilp's hand with both his elbows alternately. "You'll get something you won't like if you don't, and so I tell you."

"You dog," snarled Quilp, "I'll beat you with an iron rod, I'll scratch you with a rusty nail, I'll pinch your eyes, if you talk to me! I will!"

With these threats he clinched his hand again, and diving in between the elbows and catching the boy's head as it dodged from side to side, gave it three or four good hard knocks.

"You won't do it again," said the boy, nodding his head and drawing back, with the elbows ready in case of the worst.

"Stand still, you dog," said Quilp. "I won't do it again, because I've done it as often as I want. Here. Take the key. Now, open the counting-house."

The boy sulkily complied, muttering at first, but desisting when he looked around and saw that Quilp was following him with a steady look.

"Now," said Quilp, passing into the wooden counting-house, "you mind the wharf. Stand upon your head again, and I'll cut one of your feet off."

It was a dirty little box, this counting-house, with nothing in it but an odd rickety desk and two stools, a hat-peg, an ancient almanac, an ink-stand with no ink, and the stump of one pen, and an eight-day clock which hadn't gone for eighteen years at least, and of which the minute hand had been twisted off for a toothpick. Daniel Quilp pulled his hat over his brows, climbed on to the desk, and, stretching his short length upon it, went to sleep with the ease of an old practitioner. He had not been asleep a quarter of an hour when the boy opened the door and thrust in his head, which was like a bundle of badly picked oakum.¹ Quilp was a light sleeper and started up directly.

"Here's somebody for you," said the boy.

"Who?"

"I don't know."

"Ask!" said Quilp, "ask, you dog."

The cause of the interruption now presented herself at the door.

"What, Nelly!" cried Quilp.

"Yes," said the child, hesitating whether to enter or retreat, "it's only me, sir."

"Come in," said Quilp, without getting off the desk.

"Come in and shut the door. What's your message, Nelly?"

The child handed him a letter. Mr. Quilp, without changing his position otherwise than to turn over a little more on his side and rest his chin on his hand, proceeded to make himself acquainted with its contents.

¹ old ropes untwisted and pulled into loose hemp.

CHAPTER IV.

NELL TELLS A SECRET.

LITTLE NELL stood timidly by, with her eyes raised to the countenance of Mr. Quilp, as he read the letter, plainly showing by her looks that while she entertained some fear and distrust of the little man, she was much inclined to laugh at his uncouth appearance.

That Mr. Quilp was perplexed by the contents of the letter, was sufficiently obvious. Before he had got through the first two or three lines he began to open his eyes very wide, and to frown most horribly. After folding and laying it down beside him, he bit the nails of all his ten fingers with extreme voracity; and taking it up sharply, read it again.

"Halloo here!" he said at length, in a voice, and with a suddenness, which made the child start as though a gun had been fired off at her ear. "Nelly."

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know what's inside this letter, Nell?"

"No, sir, indeed I don't."

"Well!" muttered Quilp, as he marked her earnest look. "I believe you. Humph! Gone already! Gone in four-and-twenty hours. What has he done with it? That's the mystery."

This reflection set him biting his nails once more. While he was thus employed, his features gradually relaxed into a cheerful smile; and when the child looked up again she found that he was regarding her with extraordinary favor.

"You look very pretty to-day, Nelly, charmingly pretty. Are you tired, Nelly?"

"No, sir. I'm in a hurry to get back, for he will be anxious while I am away. He told me to return directly I had the answer."

"But you haven't it, Nelly," retorted the dwarf, "and

won't have it, and can't have it, until I have been home, so you see that to do your errand you must go with me. Reach me yonder hat, my dear, and we'll go directly." With that Mr. Quilp suffered himself to roll gradually off the desk until his short legs touched the ground, when he led the way from the counting-house to the wharf outside.

There was only Mrs. Quilp at home, and she, little expecting the return of her lord, was just composing herself for a refreshing slumber when the sound of his footsteps roused her. She had barely time to seem to be occupied in some needle-work, when he entered, accompanied by the child.

"Here's Nelly Trent, dear Mrs. Quilp," said her husband. "A glass of wine, my dear, and a biscuit, for she has had a long walk. She'll sit with you, my soul, while I write a letter."

Mrs. Quilp looked tremblingly in her spouse's face to know what this unusual courtesy might portend, and obedient to the summons she saw in his gesture, followed him into the next room.

"Mind what I say to you," whispered Quilp. "See if you can get out of her anything about her grandfather, or what they do, or how they live. I've my reasons for knowing, if I can. You women talk more freely to one another than you do to us, and you have a soft, mild way with you that'll win upon her. Do you hear?"

"Dear Quilp," faltered his wife, "I love the child—if you *could* do without making me deceive her—"

The dwarf looked round as if for some weapon with which to punish his disobedient wife. The submissive little woman hurriedly entreated him not to be angry, and promised to do as he bid her.

"Do you hear me?" whispered Quilp, nipping and pinching her arm; "worm' yourself into her secrets; I know you can. I'm listening, recollect. If you're not sharp enough

¹ to artfully work or creep into.

I'll creak the door, and woe betide you if I have to creak it much. Go!"

Mrs. Quilp departed according to order. Her amiable husband, ensconcing¹ himself behind the partly opened door, and applying his ear close to it, began to listen with a face of great craftiness and attention.

Poor Mrs. Quilp was thinking, however, in what manner to begin or what kind of inquiries she could make; it was not until the door, creaking in a very urgent manner, warned her to proceed without further consideration, that the sound of her voice was heard.

"How very often you have come backward and forward lately to Mr. Quilp, my dear!"

"I have said so to grandfather a hundred times," returned Nell, innocently.

"And what has he said to that?"

"Only sighed, and seemed so sad and wretched, that if you could have seen him I am sure you must have cried. How that door creaks!"

"It often does," returned Mrs. Quilp. "But your grandfather—he used not to be so wretched?"

"Oh, no!" said the child, "so different! we were once so happy and he so cheerful and contented! You cannot think what a sad change has fallen on us since."

"I am very, very sorry to hear you speak like this, my dear!" said Mrs. Quilp. And she spoke the truth.

"Thank you," returned the child, "you are always kind to me, and it is a pleasure to talk to you. I can speak to no one else about him, but poor Kit. I am very happy still; but you cannot think how it grieves me sometimes to see him alter so."

"He'll alter again, Nelly," said Mrs. Quilp, "and be what he was before."

"Oh, if God would only let that come about!" said the child with streaming eyes.

¹ hiding.

"Nelly, Nelly!" said the poor woman. "I can't bear to see one as young as you so sorrowful. Pray don't cry."

"I do so very seldom," said Nell, "but I have kept this to myself a long time, and I am not quite well, I think, for the tears come into my eyes and I cannot keep them back. I don't mind telling you my grief, for I know you will not tell it to any one again. He has no sleep or rest, but that which he takes by day in his easy-chair; for every night and nearly all night long he is away from home."

"Nelly!"

"Hush!" said the child, laying her finger on her lip and looking around. "When he comes home in the morning, which is generally just before day, I let him in. Last night he was very late, and it was quite light. I saw that his face was deathly pale, and that his legs trembled as he walked. When I had gone to bed again, I heard him groan. I got up and ran back to him, and heard him say, before he knew that I was there, that he could not bear this life much longer, and if it was not for the child, would wish to die. Oh! what shall I do?"

The fountains of her heart were opened; the child, overpowered by the weight of her sorrows and anxieties, hid her face in the arms of her helpless friend, and burst into a passion of tears.

In a few moments Mr. Quilp returned, and expressed the utmost surprise to find her in this condition, which he did very naturally, for that kind of acting had been rendered familiar to him by long practice, and he was quite at home in it. He unintentionally adopted the very best means he could have devised for the recovery of his young visitor by patting her on the head, but the child shrunk from his touch and felt such a desire to get out of his reach, that she rose directly and declared herself ready to return.

"But you'd better wait and dine with Mrs. Quilp and me," said the dwarf.

"I have been away too long, sir, already," returned Nell, drying her eyes.

"Well," said Mr. Quilp, "if you will go, you will, Nelly. Here's the note. It's only to say that I shall see him to-morrow, or may be next day, and that I couldn't do that little business for him this morning. Good-bye, Nelly."

CHAPTER V.

QUILP WAS DECEIVED.

ONE night, the third after Nelly's interview with Mrs. Quilp, the old man, who had been weak and ill all day, said he should not leave home. The child's eyes sparkled at the intelligence, but her joy subsided when they reverted to his worn and sickly face.

"Two days," he said, "two whole clear days have passed, and there is no reply. What *did* he tell thee, Nell?"

"Exactly what I told you, dear grandfather, indeed."

"True," said the old man, faintly. "Yes. But tell me again, Nell. My head fails me. What was it that he told thee? Nothing more than that he would see me to-morrow or next day? That was in the note."

"Nothing more," said the child. "Shall I go to him again to-morrow, dear grandfather?"

The old man shook his head, and drew her toward him.

"'Twould be of no use, my dear. But if he deserts me, Nell, at this moment—if he deserts me now, when I should, with his assistance, be recompensed for all the time and money I have lost, and all the agony of mind I have undergone, which makes me what you see—I am ruined, and—worse, far worse than that—have ruined thee, for whom I ventured all. If we are beggars—"

"What if we are?" said the child, boldly. "Let us be beggars, and be happy."

"Beggars—and happy!" said the old man. "Poor child!"

"Dear grandfather," cried the girl, with trembling voice, "hear me pray that we may beg, or work in open roads or fields, to earn a scanty living, rather than live as we do now."

"Nelly!" said the old man.

"Yes, yes, rather than live as we do now," the child repeated, more earnestly than before. "If you are sorrowful, let me know why and be sorrowful too; if you waste away and are paler and weaker every day, let me be your nurse and try to comfort you. If you are poor, let us be poor together; but let me be with you. Let us walk through country places, and sleep in fields and under trees, and never think of money again, but rest at nights, and have the sun and wind upon our faces in the day, and thank God together! Let us never set foot in dark rooms or melancholy houses any more, but wander up and down wherever we like to go; and when you are tired, you shall stop to rest in the pleasantest place that we can find, and I will go and beg for both."

The child's voice was lost in sobs as she dropped upon the old man's neck; nor did she weep alone.

These were not words for other ears, and yet other ears were there and greedily taking in all that passed, and moreover they were the ears of no less a person than Mr. Daniel Quilp, who, having entered unseen when the child first placed herself at the old man's side, refrained from interrupting the conversation, and stood looking on with his accustomed grin. Standing, however, being a tiresome attitude for a gentleman already fatigued with walking, the dwarf soon cast his eyes upon a chair, into which he skipped with uncommon agility, and perching himself on the back with his feet upon the seat, was thus enabled to look on and listen with greater comfort to himself. In this position the old man, happening in course of time to look that way, at length chanced to see him, to his unbounded astonishment.

The child uttered a suppressed shriek on beholding this

agreeable figure; in their first surprise both she and the old man, not knowing what to say, and half doubting its reality, looked shrinkingly at it. Not at all disconcerted by this reception, Daniel Quilp preserved the same attitude, merely nodding twice or thrice with great condescension. At length the old man pronounced his name, and inquired how he came there.

"Through the door," said Quilp, pointing over his shoulder with his thumb. "I want to have some talk with you, and in private. Good-bye, little Nelly."

Nell looked at the old man, who nodded to her to retire, and kissed her cheek.

"Ah!" said the dwarf, "what a nice kiss that was! What a capital kiss!"

Nell was none the slower in going away, for this remark. Quilp looked after her with an admiring leer, and when she had closed the door, fell to complimenting the old man upon her charms.

The old man answered by a forced smile, as he paced restlessly up and down the room, and presently returned to his seat. Here he remained, with his head bowed upon his breast for some time, and then suddenly raising it, said:

"Once, and once for all, have you brought me any money?"

"No!" returned Quilp.

"Then," said the old man, clinching his hands desperately and looking upward, "the child and I are lost!"

"Neighbor," said Quilp, glancing sternly at him, "you have no secret from me now."

The old man looked up, trembling.

"You are surprised," said Quilp. "Well, perhaps that's natural. You have no secret from me now, I say. For now I know that all those sums of money, and all those loans, that you have had from me, have found their way to the gaming-table, your nightly haunt. This was the precious scheme to make your fortune, was it; this was the secret certain source

of wealth in which I was to have sunk my money; this was your inexhaustible mine of gold, eh?"

"Yes," cried the old man, turning upon him with gleaming eyes, "it was. It is. It will be till I die."

"That I should have been blinded," said Quilp, looking contemptuously at him, "by a mere, shallow gambler! When did you first begin this mad career?"

"When did I first begin?" rejoined the old man, passing his hand across his brow. "When *was* it that I first began? When should it be, but when I began to think how little I had saved, how long a time it took to save it all, how short a time I might have at my age to live, and how she would be left to the rough mercies of the world? Then it was that I began to think about it."

"You lost what money you had laid by, first, and then came to me. While I thought you were making your fortune you were making yourself a beggar, eh? Dear me! And so it comes to pass that I hold every security you could scrape together, and a bill of sale upon the—upon the stock and property," said Quilp, standing up and looking about him, as if to assure himself that none of it had been taken away.

"But did you never win?"

"Never!" groaned the old man. "Never won back my loss! But give me some help. I *must* win. I only want a little help once more, a few pounds, but two-score pounds, dear Quilp."

"I couldn't do it, really," said Quilp, with unusual politeness, "though I tell you what—I was deceived by the penurious way in which you lived, alone with Nelly—"

"All done to save money for tempting fortune," cried the old man.

"I understand that now," said Quilp; "but I was so deceived by your miserly way, that I'd have advanced you, even now, what you want, if I hadn't unexpectedly become acquainted with your secret way of life."

"Who is it," retorted the old man, "that told you? Come, let me know the name—the person. It was Kit; it must have been the boy; he played the spy, and you tampered with him."

"How came you to think of him?" said the dwarf, in a tone of great commiseration. "Yes, it was Kit. Poor Kit!"

So saying, he nodded in a friendly manner, and took his leave, stopping when he had passed the outer door a little distance, and grinning with extraordinary delight.

"Poor Kit!" muttered Quilp. "I think it was Kit who said I was an uglier dwarf than could be seen anywhere for a penny, wasn't it? Ha, ha, ha! Poor Kit!"

And with that he went his way, still chuckling as he went.

CHAPTER VI.

MORE ALONE THAN EVER.

QUIET and solitude were destined to hold uninterrupted rule no longer beneath the roof that sheltered the child. Next morning the old man was in a raging fever accompanied with delirium; and he lay for many weeks in imminent peril of his life. The child was more alone than she had ever been before; alone in spirit, alone in her devotion to him who was wasting away upon his burning bed, alone in her sorrow and her sympathy.

The house was no longer theirs. Even the sick-chamber seemed to be retained on Mr. Quilp's favor. The old man's illness had not lasted many days when he took formal possession of the premises and all upon them. With the assistance of a man of law whom he brought with him for the purpose, the dwarf proceeded to establish himself in the house, and then set about making his quarters comfortable, after his own fashion. To this end Mr. Quilp encamped in the back parlor, having first put a stop to any further business by shutting up the shop. Having looked out, from among the old furniture,

the handsomest and most commodious chair he could possibly find (which he reserved for his own use), and an especially hideous and uncomfortable one (which he considerably appropriated to the accommodation of his friend), he caused them to be carried into this room, and took up his position in great state. These arrangements completed, Mr. Quilp looked round him with chuckling satisfaction, and remarked that he called that comfort.

Nell shrunk timidly from all the dwarf's advances toward conversation, and fled from the very sound of his voice; nor were the lawyer's smiles less terrible to her. She lived in such continual dread and apprehension of meeting one or other of them on the stairs or in the passages if she stirred from her grandfather's chamber, that she seldom left it for a moment until late at night, when the silence encouraged her to venture forth and breathe the purer air of some empty room.

CHAPTER VII.

FREE AND HAPPY AS BIRDS.

At length the crisis of the old man's disorder was past, and he began to mend. By very slow and feeble degrees his consciousness came back. He would sit for hours together with Nell's small hand in his, playing with the fingers, and stopping sometimes to smooth her hair or kiss her brow; and when he saw that tears were glistening in her eyes, would look, amazed, about him for the cause, and forget his wonder even while he looked.

The child and he rode out, the old man propped up with pillows, and the child beside him. They were hand in hand, as usual. The noise and motion in the streets fatigued his brain at first, but he was not surprised, or curious, or pleased, or irritated. He was asked if he remembered this or that. "Oh, yes," he said, "quite well—why not?"

He was sitting in his easy-chair one day, and Nell upon a stool beside him, when a man outside the door inquired if he might enter.

"Yes," he said, with emotion. It was Quilp, he knew. Quilp was master there. Of course he might come in. And he did so.

"I'm glad to see you well again at last, neighbor," said the dwarf, sitting down opposite him. "You're quite strong now?"

"Yes," said the old man, feebly, "yes."

"I don't want to hurry you, you know, neighbor," said the dwarf, raising his voice, for the old man's senses were duller than they had been; "but as soon as you *can* arrange your future proceedings, the better."

"Surely," said the old man. "The better for all parties."

"You see," pursued Quilp, after a short pause, "the goods being once removed, the house would be uncomfortable, uninhabitable, in fact."

"You say true," returned the old man. "Poor Nell, too; what would *she* do?"

"Exactly," bawled the dwarf, nodding his head; "that's very well observed. Then will you consider about it, neighbor?"

"I will, certainly," replied the old man. "We shall not stop here."

"So I supposed," said the dwarf. "I have sold the things. They have not yielded quite as much as they might have done, but pretty well—pretty well. To-day's Tuesday. When shall they be moved? There's no hurry—shall we say this afternoon?"

"Say Friday morning," returned the old man.

"Very good," said the dwarf. "So be it—with the understanding that I can't go beyond that day, neighbor, on any account."

"Good," returned the old man. "I shall remember it."

Mr. Quilp seemed rather puzzled by the strange, even spiritless way in which all this was said; but as the old man nodded his head and repeated "on Friday morning. I shall remember it," he had no excuse for dwelling on the subject any further.

All that day and all the next the old man remained in this state. He wandered up and down the house and into and out of the various rooms, as if with some vague intent of bidding them adieu, but he referred neither by direct allusions nor in any other manner to the interview of the morning or the necessity of finding some other shelter.

Thursday arrived, and there was no alteration in the old man. But a change came upon him that evening as he and the child sat silently together.

In a small, dull yard below his window there was a tree—green and flourishing enough for such a place—and as the air stirred among its leaves, it threw a rippling shadow on the white wall. The old man sat watching the shadows as they trembled in this patch of light, until the sun went down; and when it was night, and the moon was slowly rising, he still sat in the same spot.

The child thought more than once that he was moved, and had forborne to speak. But now he shed tears—tears that it lightened her aching heart to see—and making as though he would fall upon his knees, besought her to forgive him.

"Forgive you—what?" said Nell, interposing to prevent his purpose. "Oh, grandfather, what should *I* forgive?"

"All that is past, all that has come upon thee, Nell, all that was done in the uneasy dream," returned the old man.

"Do not talk so," said the child. "Pray do not. Let us speak of something else."

"Yes, yes, we will," he rejoined. "And it shall be of what we talked of long ago—many months—months, is it, or weeks, or days? Which is it, Nell?"

"I do not understand you," said the child.

"It has come back upon me to-day, it has all come back since we have been sitting here. I bless thee for it, Nell."

"For what, dear grandfather?"

"For what you said when we were first made beggars, Nell. Let us speak softly. Hush! for if they knew our purpose downstairs, they would cry that I was mad, and take thee from me. We will not stop here another day. We will go far away from here."

"Yes, let us go," said the child, earnestly. "Let us be gone from this place, and never turn back or think of it again. Let us wander barefoot through the world, rather than linger here."

"We will," answered the old man, "we will travel afoot through the fields and woods, and by the side of rivers, and trust ourselves to God in the places where He dwells. Let us steal away to-morrow morning—early and softly, that we may not be seen or heard—and leave no trace or track for them to follow by. Poor Nell! Thy cheek is pale, and thy eyes are heavy with watching and weeping for me—I know—for me; but thou wilt be well again, and merry too, when we are far away. To-morrow morning, dear, we'll turn our faces from this scene of sorrow, and be as free and happy as the birds."

And then the old man clasped his hands above her head, and said in a few broken words that from that time forth they would wander up and down together, and never part more until Death took one or the other of the twain.

The child's heart beat high with hope and confidence. She had no thought of hunger, or cold, or thirst, or suffering. Sun, and stream, and meadow, and summer days, shone brightly in her view, and there was no dark tint in all the sparkling picture.

The old man had slept for some hours soundly in his bed, and she was yet busily engaged in preparing for their flight. There were a few articles of clothing for herself to carry, and a few for him; old garments, such as became their fallen for-

tunes, laid out to wear; and a staff to support his feeble steps put ready for his use. But this was not all her task, for now she must visit the old rooms for the last time.

And how different the parting with them was from any she had expected, and most of all from that which she had oftenest pictured to herself! How could she ever have thought of bidding them farewell in triumph, when the recollection of the many hours she had passed among them rose to her swelling heart, and made her feel the wish a cruelty, lonely and sad though many of those hours had been! She sat down at the window where she had spent so many evenings—darker far than this—and every thought of hope or cheerfulness that had occurred to her in that place came vividly upon her mind and blotted out all its dull and mournful associations in an instant.

Her own little room, too, where she had so often knelt down and prayed at night—the little room where she had slept so peacefully, and dreamed such pleasant dreams! It was hard not to be able to glance around it once more, and to be forced to leave it without one kind look or grateful tear. There were some trifles there—poor, useless things—that she would have liked to take away, but that was impossible.

This brought to mind her bird, her poor bird, who hung there yet. She wept bitterly for the loss of this little creature—until the idea occurred to her—she did not know how or why it came into her head—that it might, by some means, fall into the hands of Kit, who would keep it for her sake, and think, perhaps, that she had left it behind in the hope that he might have it, and as an assurance that she was grateful to him. She was calmed and comforted by the thought, and went to rest with a lighter heart.

She awoke to find that it was yet night, and that the stars were shining brightly in the sky. At length the day began to glimmer, and the stars to grow pale and dim. As soon as she was sure of this, she arose and dressed herself for the journey. The old man was yet asleep, and as she was unwilling to dis-

turb him, she left him to slumber on until the sun rose. He was anxious that they should leave the house without a minute's loss of time, and was soon ready.

The child then took him by the hand, and they trod lightly and cautiously down the stairs, trembling whenever a board creaked, and often stopping to listen. The old man had forgotten a kind of wallet which contained the light burden he had to carry, and the going back a few steps to fetch it seemed an interminable delay.

At last they reached the passage on the ground floor, where the snoring of Mr. Quilp and his legal friend sounded more terrible in their ears than the roars of lions. They got the door open without noise, and passing into the street, stood still.

"Which way?" said the child.

The old man looked, first at her, then to the right and left, then at her again, and shook his head. It was plain that she was thenceforth his guide and leader. The child felt it, but had no doubts or misgiving, and putting her hand in his, led him gently away.

It was the beginning of a day in June, the deep-blue sky unsullied by a cloud, and teeming with brilliant light. The streets were, as yet, nearly free from passengers, the houses and shops were closed, and the healthy air of morning fell like breath from angels on the sleeping town.

The old man and the child passed on through the glad silence, elate with hope and pleasure. They were alone together once again; every object was bright and fresh; church towers and steeples, frowning and dark at other times, now shone in the sun; each humble nook and corner rejoiced in light, and the sky, dimmed only by excessive distance, shed its placid smile on everything beneath.

Forth from the city, while it yet slumbered, went the two poor adventurers, wandering they knew not whither.

CHAPTER VIII.

CLEAR OF LONDON AT LAST.

OFTEN, while they were yet pacing the silent streets of the town on the morning of their departure, the child trembled with a mingled sensation of hope and fear as in some far-off figure, imperfectly seen in the clear distance, her fancy traced a likeness to honest Kit. But although she would gladly have given him her hand, it was always a relief to find, when they came nearer, that the person who approached was not he, but a stranger; for even if she had not dreaded the effect which the sight of him might have wrought upon her fellow-traveler, she felt that to bid farewell to anybody now, and most of all to him who had been so faithful and so true, was more than she could bear. It was enough to leave dumb things behind, and objects that were insensible both to her love and sorrow. To have parted from her only other friend upon the threshold of that wild journey, would have wrung her heart indeed.

The town was glad with morning light; places that had shown ugly and distrustful all night long, now wore a smile; and sparkling sunbeams dancing on chamber windows, and twinkling through blind and curtain before sleepers' eyes, shed light even into dreams, and chased away the shadows of the night. The flowers that sleep by night opened their gentle eyes and turned them to the day. The light, creation's mind, was everywhere, and all things owned its power.

The two pilgrims, often pressing each other's hands, or exchanging a smile or cheerful look, pursued their way in silence. Bright and happy as it was, there was something solemn in the long, deserted streets, from which, like bodies without souls, all habitual character and expression had departed, leaving but one dead uniform repose, that made them all alike.

Before they had penetrated very far into the labyrinth of men's abodes which yet lay between them and the outskirts,

this aspect began to melt away, and noise and bustle to usurp its place. The wonder was, at first, to see a tradesman's room window open; but now it was a rare thing to see one closed; then smoke rose slowly from the chimneys, and sashes were thrown up to let in air, and doors were opened, and servant-girls, looking lazily in all directions but their brooms, scattered brown clouds of dust into the eyes of shrinking passengers.

This quarter passed, they came upon the haunts of commerce and great traffic, where many people were resorting, and business was already rife. The old man looked about him with a startled and bewildered gaze, for these were places that he hoped to shun.

Again, this quarter passed, they came upon a straggling neighborhood, where the mean houses, parceled off in rooms, and windows patched with rags and paper, told of the poverty that sheltered there.

At length these streets becoming more straggling yet, dwindled and dwindled away, until there were only small garden patches bordering the road, with many a summer-house, built of old timber or some fragments of a boat, green as the tough cabbage-stalks that grew about it. To these succeeded cottages, with plots of ground in front, laid out in angular beds with stiff box borders and narrow paths between, where footstep never strayed to make the gravel rough. Then came fields, and then some houses, one by one, of goodly size, with lawns, some even with a lodge where dwelt a porter and his wife. Then came a turnpike, then fields again with trees and haystacks; then a hill, and on the top of that the traveler might stop and feel at last that he was clear of London.

Near such a spot as this, and in a pleasant field, the old man and his little guide sat down to rest. She had had the precaution to furnish her basket with some slices of bread and meat, and here they made their frugal breakfast.

There was a pool of clear water in the field, in which the child laved her hands and face, and cooled her feet before set-

ting forth to walk again. She would have the old man refresh himself in this way, too, and, making him sit down upon the grass, cast the water on him with her hand and dried it with her simple dress.

"I can do nothing for myself, my darling," said the grandfather. "I don't know how it is. I could once, but the time's gone. Don't leave me, Nell; say that thou'lt not leave me. I loved thee all the while, indeed I did. If I lose thee, too, my dear, I must die."

He laid his head upon her shoulder and moaned piteously. The time had been, and a very few days before, when the child could not have restrained her tears and must have wept with him. But now she soothed him with gentle and tender words, smiled at his thinking they could ever part, and rallied him cheerfully upon the jest. He was soon calmed and fell asleep, singing to himself in a low voice, like a little child.

He awoke refreshed, and they continued their journey. The road was pleasant, lying between beautiful pastures and fields of corn, about which, poised high in the clear blue sky, the lark trilled out her happy song. The air came laden with the fragrance it caught upon its way, and the bees, upborne upon its scented breath, hummed forth their drowsy satisfaction as they floated by.

They walked all day, and slept that night at a small cottage where beds were let to travelers. Next morning they were afoot again, and though jaded at first, and very tired, recovered before long and proceeded briskly forward.

It was nearly five o'clock in the afternoon, when drawing near a cluster of laborers' huts, the child looked wistfully in each, doubtful at which to ask for permission to rest awhile, and buy a draught of milk. It was not easy to determine, for she was timid and fearful of being repulsed.

At length she stopped at one—chiefly because there was an old man sitting in a cushioned chair beside the hearth, and she thought he was a grandfather and would feel for hers.

There were, besides, the cottager and his wife, and three young sturdy children, brown as berries. The request was no sooner preferred than granted. The eldest boy ran out to fetch some milk, the second dragged two stools toward the door, and the youngest crept to his mother's gown, and looked at the strangers from beneath his sunburned hand.

"God save you, master," said the old cottager, in a thin, piping voice. "Are you traveling far?"

"Yes, sir, a long way," replied the child; for her grandfather appealed to her.

"From London?" inquired the old man.

The child said yes.

The milk arrived, and the child, producing her little basket, and selecting its best fragments for her grandfather, they made a hearty meal. The furniture of the room was very homely, but everything was clean and neat, and as the child glanced around, she felt a tranquil air of comfort and content to which she had long been unaccustomed.

"How far is it to any town or village?" she asked of the husband.

"A matter of good five mile, my dear," was the reply; "but you're not going on to-night?"

"Yes, yes, Nell," said the old man, hastily, urging her, too, by signs. "Further on, further on, darling, further away if we walk till midnight."

But the woman had observed, from the young wanderer's gait, that one of her little feet was blistered and sore, and being a woman and a mother, too, she would not suffer her to go until she had washed the place and applied some simple remedy, which she did so carefully and with such a gentle hand that the child's heart was too full to admit of her saying more than a fervent "God bless you!" nor could she look back nor trust herself to speak until they had left the cottage some distance behind.

They trudged forward more slowly and painfully than they

had done yet, for another mile or thereabouts, when they heard the sound of wheels behind them, and, looking around, observed an empty cart approaching pretty briskly. The driver, on coming up to them, stopped his horse and looked earnestly at Nell.

“Didn’t you stop to rest at a cottage yonder?” he said.

“Yes, sir,” replied the child.

“Ah! they asked me to look out for you,” said the man. “I’m going your way. Give me your hand—jump up, master.”

This was a great relief, for they were very much fatigued, and could scarcely crawl along. To them the jolting cart was a luxurious carriage, and the ride the most delicious in the world. Nell had scarcely settled herself on a little heap of straw in one corner, when she fell asleep, for the first time that day.

She was awakened by the stopping of the cart, which was about to turn up a by-lane. The driver kindly got down to help her out, and pointing to some trees at a very short distance before them, said that the town lay there, and that they had better take the path which they would see leading through the church-yard. Accordingly, toward this spot they directed their weary steps.

CHAPTER IX.

PUNCH AND JUDY.

THE old man and the child quitted the gravel path, and strayed among the tombs; for there the ground was soft and easy to their tired feet. As they passed behind the church they heard voices near at hand, and presently came on those who had spoken.

They were two men, who were seated in easy attitudes upon the grass and so busily engaged as to be at first unconscious of intruders. It was not difficult to divine that they were of a

class of itinerant showmen—exhibitors of the freaks of Punch¹—for perched cross-legged upon a tombstone behind them was a figure of that hero himself, his nose and chin as hooked, and his face as beaming as ever. He preserved his usual smile though his body was in a most uncomfortable position.

In part scattered upon the ground at the feet of the two men, and in part jumbled together in a long flat box, were the other persons of the Drama. The hero's wife and one child, the hobby-horse, the doctor, the foreign gentleman who, not being familiar with the language, is unable in the representation to express his ideas otherwise than by the utterance of the word "Shallalalah" three distinct times, the neighbor who will by no means admit that a tin bell is an organ, the executioner, and the devil, were all here.² Their owners had evidently come to that spot to make some needful repairs in the stage arrangements, for one of them was engaged in binding together a small gallows with thread, while the other was intent upon fixing a new black wig, with the aid of a small hammer and some tacks, upon the head of the neighbor, who had been beaten bald.

They raised their eyes when the old man and his young companion were close upon them, and pausing in their work, returned their looks of curiosity. One of them, the actual exhibitor, was a little merry-faced man with a twinkling eye and a red nose, who seemed to have imbibed something of his hero's character. The other—that was he who took the money—had rather a careful and cautious look, which was perhaps inseparable from his occupation also.

The merry man was the first to greet the strangers with a nod, and following the old man's eyes, he observed that perhaps that was the first time he had ever seen a Punch off the stage.

¹ a short, hump-backed, hooked-nosed figure, the chief character in a puppet show called "Punch and Judy"; he strangles his

child, beats his wife to death, and does many other queer and wonderful things.

² all being characters in the show.

"Why do you come here to do this?" said the old man, sitting down beside them, and looking at the figures with extreme delight.

"Why, you see," rejoined the little man, "we're putting up for to-night at the public-house yonder, and it wouldn't do to let them see the present company undergoing repair."

"Good!" said the old man, venturing to touch one of the puppets, and drawing away his hand with a shrill laugh. "Are you going to show 'em to-night? are you?"

"That is the intention, governor," replied the other, "and unless I'm much mistaken, Tommy Codlin is a-calculating at this minute what we've lost through your coming upon us. Cheer up, Tommy, it can't be much."

Turning over the figures in the box like one who knew and despised them, Mr. Codlin drew one forth and held it up for the inspection of his friend.

"Look here; here's all this Judy's clothes falling to pieces again. You haven't got a needle and thread, I suppose?"

The little man shook his head. Seeing that they were at a loss, the child said, timidly:

"I have a needle, sir, in my basket, and thread, too. Will you let me try to mend it for you? I think I could do it neater than you could."

Even Mr. Codlin had nothing to urge against a proposal so seasonable. Nelly, kneeling down beside the box, was soon busily engaged in her task, and accomplishing it to a miracle.

While she was thus engaged, the merry little man looked at her with an interest which did not appear to be diminished when he glanced at her helpless companion. When she had finished her work he thanked her, and inquired whither they were traveling.

"N-no further to-night, I think," said the child, looking toward her grandfather.

"If you are wanting a place to stop at," the man remarked, "I should advise you to take up at the same house with

us. That's it—the long, low, white house there. It's very cheap."

The old man, notwithstanding his fatigue, would have remained in the church-yard all night, if his new acquaintances had remained there too. As he yielded to this suggestion a ready assent, they all rose and walked away together, he keeping close to the box of puppets, the merry little man carrying it slung over his arm by a strap attached to it for the purpose, Nelly having hold of her grandfather's hand, and Mr. Codlin sauntering slowly behind.

The public-house was kept by a fat old landlord and landlady who praised Nelly's beauty and were at once prepossessed in her behalf. The landlady was very much astonished to learn that they had come all the way from London, and appeared to have no little curiosity touching their further destination. The child parried her inquiries as well as she could and with no great trouble, for, finding that they appeared to give her pain, the old lady desisted.

"These two gentlemen have ordered supper in an hour's time," she said, taking her into the bar; "and your best plan will be to sup with them. Meanwhile, you shall have a little taste of something that'll do you good, for I'm sure you must want it after all you've gone through to-day. Now, don't look after the old gentleman, because when you've drunk that, he shall have some too."

As nothing could induce the child to leave him alone, however, or to touch anything in which he was not the first or greatest sharer, the old lady was obliged to help him first.

The supper was very good, but Nell was too tired to eat, and yet would not leave the old man until she had kissed him in his bed. He, happily insensible to every care and anxiety, sat listening to all that his new friends said; and it was not until they retired, yawning, to their rooms, that he followed the child upstairs.

It was but a loft partitioned into two compartments, where

they were to rest, but they were well pleased with their lodging, and had hoped for none so good. The old man was uneasy when he had lain down, and begged that Nell would come and sit at his bedside as she had done for so many nights. She hastened to him, and sat there till he slept.

She had a little money, but it was very little, and when that was gone they must begin to beg. There was one piece of gold among it, and an emergency¹ might come when its worth to them might be increased a hundred-fold. It would be best to hide this coin, and never produce it unless their case was absolutely desperate, and no other resource was left them. Her resolution taken, she sewed the piece of gold into her dress, and going to bed with a lighter heart, sunk into a deep slumber.

Another bright day shining in through the small casement, and claiming fellowship with the kindred eyes of the child, awoke her.

The old man was soon up and dressed. Mr. Codlin and his companion came in to breakfast, at which meal they all sat down together.

"And where are you going to-day?" said the little man, addressing himself to Nell.

"Indeed I hardly know—we have not determined yet," replied the child.

"We're going on to the races," said the little man. "If that's your way, and you like to have us for company, let us travel together."

"We'll go with you," said the old man. "Nell—with them, with them."

The child considered for a moment, and reflecting that she must shortly beg, and could scarcely hope to do so at a better place than where crowds of rich ladies and gentlemen were assembled together for purposes of enjoyment and festivity, determined to accompany these men so far. She therefore

¹ a pressing necessity.

thanked the little man for his offer, and said, glancing timidly toward his friend, that if there was no objection to their accompanying them as far as the race town—

“Objection!” said the little man. “Now be gracious for once, Tommy, and say that you’d rather they went with us.”

“Trotters!” said Mr. Codlin, “you’re too free.”

“Why, what harm can it do?” urged the other.

“No harm at all in this particular case, perhaps,” replied Mr. Codlin; “but the principle’s a dangerous one.”

“Well, are they to go with us or not?”

“Yes, they are,” said Mr. Codlin; “but you might have made a favor of it, mightn’t you?”

The real name of the little man was Harris, but it had gradually merged into Trotters, which, with the prefatory adjective Short, had been conferred upon him by reason of the small size of his legs. Short Trotters, however, being a compound name, inconvenient of use in friendly dialogue, the gentleman was known either as “Short” or “Trotters,” and was seldom accosted at full length as Short Trotters.

Breakfast being over, they resumed their journey and traveled all day. Towards evening, as the clouds threatened rain, Mr. Codlin proposed that they should stop for the night at the Jolly Sandboys, an inn not far distant, and doggedly declaring he would go no further that day, and put up nowhere else, he hastened on in advance.

CHAPTER X.

CODLIN’S THE FRIEND, NOT SHORT.

THE Jolly Sandboys was a small road-side inn of pretty ancient date, with a sign, representing three Sandboys increasing their jollity with as many jugs of ale and bags of gold, creaking and swinging on its post on the opposite side of the road. Codlin found the landlord leaning against the door-post, looking at the rain, which had begun to descend heavily.

"All alone?" said Mr. Codlin, putting down his show-box and wiping his forehead.

"All alone as yet," rejoined the landlord, "but we shall have more company to-night, I expect. Here, one of you boys, carry that show into the barn. Make haste in out of the wet, Tom; when it came on to rain, I told 'em to make the fire up, and there's a glorious blaze in the kitchen, I can tell you."

Mr. Codlin now thought of his companions, and acquainted the landlord that their arrival might be shortly looked for. At length they arrived, drenched with the rain, and presenting a most miserable appearance, notwithstanding that Short had sheltered the child as well as he could under the skirts of his own coat, and they were nearly breathless from the haste they had made. They were furnished with slippers and such dry garments as the house or their own bundles afforded, and ensconcing themselves, as Mr. Codlin had already done, in the warm chimney-corner, soon forgot their late troubles. Overpowered by the warmth and comfort and the fatigue they had undergone, Nelly and the old man had not long taken their seats here when they fell asleep.

"Who are they?" whispered the landlord.

Short shook his head, and wished he knew himself.

"Don't *you* know?" asked the host, turning to Mr. Codlin.

"Not I," he replied. "They're no good, I suppose."

"They're no harm," said Short. "Depend upon that. I tell you what—it's plain that the old man ain't in his right mind. It's very plain to me, besides, that they're not used to this way of life. Don't tell me that that handsome child has been in the habit of prowling about as she's done these last two or three days. I know better. Have you seen how anxious the old man is to get on—always wanting to be further away—further away? Have you seen that?"

"Ah! what then?" muttered Thomas Codlin.

"This, then," said Short. "He has given his friends the

slip. Therefore, when they dewelop¹ an intention of parting company from us, I shall take measures for detaining of 'em, and restoring 'em to their friends."

"Short," said Mr. Codlin, "it's possible that there may be good sense in what you've said. If there is, and there should be a reward, Short, remember that we're partners in everything."

His companion had only time to nod a brief assent to this proposition, for the child awoke at the instant.

The landlord now busied himself in laying the cloth, in which process Mr. Codlin obligingly assisted by setting forth his own knife and fork in the most convenient place and establishing himself behind them. Little Nell ventured to say grace, and supper began. When it was over, the weary child prevailed upon her grandfather to retire, and they withdrew, leaving the company yet seated round the fire.

After bidding the old man good-night, Nell retired to her poor garret, but had scarcely closed the door when it was gently tapped at. She opened it directly, and was a little startled by the sight of Mr. Thomas Codlin.

"What's the matter?" said the child.

"Nothing's the matter, my dear," returned her visitor.

"I'm your friend. Perhaps you haven't thought so, but it's me that's your friend—not him."

"Not who?" the child inquired.

"Short, my dear. I tell you what," said Codlin, "Short's very well, and seems kind, but he overdoes it. Now, I don't."

The child was puzzled, and could not tell what to say.

"Take my advice," said Codlin; "don't ask me why, but take it. As long as you travel with us, keep as near me as you can. Don't offer to leave us, but always stick to me, and say that I'm your friend. Will you bear that in mind, my dear, and always say that it was me that was your friend?"

"Say so where, and when?" inquired the child, innocently.

¹ develop, *i.e.*, show sign of; uneducated natives of London pronounce *v* as *w*.

"Oh, nowhere in particular," replied Codlin, a little put out. "God bless you. Recollect the friend. Codlin's the friend, not Short. Short's very well, as far as he goes, but the real friend is Codlin—not Short."

With a number of benevolent and protecting looks and great fervor of manner, Thomas Codlin stole away on tiptoe, leaving the child in a state of extreme surprise. She was still ruminating upon his curious behavior, when the floor of the stairs cracked beneath the tread of the other travelers who were passing to their beds. When the sound of their footsteps had died away, one of them returned, and after a little hesitation, as if he were doubtful what door to knock at, knocked at hers.

"Yes," said the child from within.

"It's me—Short"—a voice called through the key-hole. "I only wanted to say that we must be off early to-morrow morning. You'll be sure to be stirring early and go with us? I'll call you."

The child answered in the affirmative, and returning his "good-night," heard him creep away.

Very early next morning Short fulfilled his promise, and knocking softly at her door, entreated that she would get up directly. She started from her bed without delay, and roused the old man with so much expedition that they were both ready as soon as Short himself.

After breakfast, they took leave of the landlord and issued from the door of the Jolly Sandboys. The morning was fine and warm, the ground cool to the feet after the late rain, the hedges gayer and more green, the air clear, and everything fresh and healthful. Surrounded by these influences, they walked on pleasantly enough.

They had not gone very far, when the child was again struck by the altered behavior of Mr. Thomas Codlin, who, instead of plodding on sulkily by himself, as he had heretofore done, kept close to her, and when he had an opportunity of looking at her unseen by his companion, warned her by certain wry

faces and jerks of the head not to put any trust in Short, but to reserve all confidences for Codlin.

Meanwhile, they were drawing near the town where the races were to begin next day. It was dark before they reached the town itself, and long indeed the few last miles had been. Here all was tumult and confusion; the streets were filled with throngs of people, the church-bells rang out their noisy peals, and flags streamed from windows and house-tops. Through this scene, the child, frightened by all she saw, led on her bewildered charge, clinging close to her conductor, and trembling lest in the press she should be separated from him and left to find her way alone. Quickening their steps to get clear of all the roar and riot, they at length passed through the town and made for the race-course, which was upon an open heath, situated on an eminence, a full mile distant from its furthest bounds. After a scanty supper, the purchase of which reduced her little stock so low that she had only a few half-pence with which to buy a breakfast on the morrow, the child and the old man lay down to rest in a corner of a tent and slept, despite the busy preparations that were going on around them all night long.

And now they had come to the time when they must beg their bread. Soon after sunrise in the morning she stole out from the tent, and rambling into some fields at a short distance, plucked a few wild roses and such humble flowers, purposing to make them into little nosegays and offer them to the ladies in the carriages when the company arrived. Her thoughts were not idle while she was thus employed. When she returned and was seated beside the old man in one corner of the tent, tying her flowers together, while the two men lay dozing in another corner, she plucked him by the sleeve and slightly glancing toward them, said in a low voice:

“Grandfather, don’t look at those I talk of, and don’t seem as though I spoke of anything but what I am about. What was that you told me before we left the old house? That if

they knew what we were going to do, they would say that you were mad, and part us?"

The old man turned to her with an aspect of wild terror; but she checked him by a look, and bidding him hold some flowers while she tied them up, and so bringing her lips closer to his ear, said:

"I know that was what you told me. You needn't speak, dear. I recollect it very well. It was not likely that I should forget it. Grandfather, these men suspect that we have secretly left our friends, and mean to carry us before some gentleman and have us taken care of and sent back. If you let your hand tremble so, we can never get away from them, but if you're only quiet now, we shall do so easily."

"How?" muttered the old man. "Dear Nelly, how? They will shut me up in a stone room, dark and cold, and chain me up to the wall, Nell—flog me with whips, and never let me see thee more."

"You're trembling again," said the child. "Keep close to me all day. Never mind them, don't look at them, but me. I shall find a time when we can steal away. When I do, mind you come with me, and do not stop or speak a word. Hush! that's all."

"Halloo! what are you up to, my dear?" said Mr. Codlin, raising his head and yawning. Then, observing that his companion was fast asleep, he added in an earnest whisper, "Codlin's the friend, remember—not Short."

"Making some nosegays," the child replied; "I am going to try and sell some, these three days of the races. Will you have one—as a present, I mean?"

Mr. Codlin would have risen to receive it, but the child hurried toward him and placed it in his hand. As the morning wore on, the tents assumed a gayer and more brilliant appearance, and long lines of carriages came rolling softly on the turf.

Along the course Short led his party, sounding the brazen trumpet, and reveling in the voice of Punch; and at his heels

went Thomas Codlin, bearing the show as usual, and keeping his eye on Nelly and her grandfather, as they rather lingered in the rear. The child bore upon her arm the little basket with her flowers, and sometimes stopped, with timid and modest looks, to offer them at some gay carriage. Many a time they went up and down those long, long lines, seeing everything but the horses and the races; when the bell rang to clear the course, going back to rest among the carts and donkeys, and not coming out again till the heat was over.

At length, late in the day, Mr. Codlin pitched the show in a convenient spot, and the spectators were soon in the very triumph of the scene. The child, sitting down with the old man close behind it, had been thinking how strange it was that horses who were such fine honest creatures should seem to make vagabonds of all the men they drew about them, when a loud laugh at some witticism of Mr. Short roused her from her meditation and caused her to look around.

If they were ever to get away unseen, that was the very moment. Short was vigorously knocking the characters in the fury of the combat against the sides of the show, the people were looking on with laughing faces, and Mr. Codlin had relaxed into a grim smile as his roving eye detected hands going into waistcoat pockets and groping secretly for sixpences. If they were ever to get away unseen, that was the very moment. They seized it and fled.

They made a path through booths and carriages and throngs of people, and never once stopped to look behind. The bell was ringing, and the course was cleared by the time they reached the ropes, but they dashed across it, and creeping under the brow of the hill at a quick pace, made for the open fields.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SCHOOL-MASTER.

It was not until they were quite exhausted, and could no longer maintain the pace at which they had fled from the race-ground, that the old man and the child ventured to stop, and sit down to rest upon the borders of a little wood.

"We are quite safe now, and have nothing to fear, dear grandfather," said Nell.

"Nothing to fear!" returned the old man. "Nothing to fear if they took me from thee! Nothing to fear if they parted us! Nobody is true to me; no, not one; not even Nell!"

"Oh! do not say that," replied the child, "for if ever anybody was true at heart, and earnest, I am. I am sure you know I am."

"Then how," said the old man, looking fearfully around, "how can you bear to think that we are safe, when they are searching for me everywhere, and may come here, and steal upon us, even while we're talking?"

"Because I'm sure we have not been followed," said the child. "We are alone together, and may ramble where we like. Not safe? Could I feel easy when any danger threatened you?"

"True," he answered, pressing her hand, but still looking anxiously about. "What noise was that?"

"A bird," said the child, "flying into the wood, and leading the way for us to follow. Come!"

When they rose up from the ground, and took the shady track which led them through the wood, she bounded on before, printing her tiny footsteps in the moss. As they passed onward, parting the boughs that clustered in their way, the serenity which the child had at first assumed stole into her breast in earnest; the old man cast no longer fearful looks behind, but felt at ease and cheerful, for the further they passed

into the deep-green shade, the more they felt that the tranquil mind of God was there, and shed its peace on them.

At length the path brought them to the end of the wood, and into a public road. Taking their way along it for a short distance, they came to a lane, so shaded by trees on either hand that they met together overhead and arched the narrow way. A broken finger-post announced that this led to a village three miles off, and thither they resolved to bend their steps.

The miles appeared so long that they sometimes thought they must have missed their road. But at last, to their great joy, it led downward in a steep descent, and the clustered houses of the village peeped from the woody hollow beneath.

It was a very small place. The men and boys were playing at cricket on the green, and the other folks were looking on. Nell and her companion wandered up and down, uncertain where to seek an humble lodging. There was one old man in a little garden before his cottage, but him they were timid of approaching, for he was the school-master, and had "School" written up over his window in black letters on a white board. He was a pale, simple-looking man, and sat among his flowers and bee-hives, smoking his pipe, in the little porch before his door.

"Speak to him, dear," the old man whispered.

Nell took courage, and ventured to draw near, leading her grandfather by the hand. The slight noise they made in raising the latch of the wicket-gate caught his attention.

Nell dropped a courtesy, and told him they were poor travelers who sought a shelter for the night, which they would gladly pay for, so far as their means allowed. The school-master looked earnestly at her as she spoke, laid aside his pipe, and rose up directly.

"If you could direct us anywhere, sir," said the child, "we should take it very kindly."

"You have been walking a long way," said the school-master.

"A long way, sir," the child replied.

"You're a young traveler, my child," he said, laying his hand gently on her head. "Your grandchild, friend?"

"Ay, sir," cried the old man, "and the stay and comfort of my life."

"Come in," said the school-master.

He conducted them into his little school-room, which was parlor and kitchen likewise, and told them that they were welcome to remain under his roof till morning. Before they had done thanking him, he spread a coarse white cloth upon the table, and bringing out some bread and cold meat, besought them to eat.

The child looked around the room as she took her seat. There were a couple of forms,¹ notched and cut and inked all over; a small desk, perched on four legs, at which no doubt the master sat; a few books upon a high shelf; and beside them a collection of tops, balls, kites, and other confiscated property of idle urchins. Displayed on hooks upon the wall, in all their terrors, were the cane and ruler,² and near them, on a small shelf of its own, the dunce's cap, made of old newspapers and decorated with glaring wafers of the largest size. But the great ornaments of the walls were certain moral sentences fairly copied in good round text, and well-worked sums in simple addition and multiplication, evidently achieved by the same hand, which were plentifully pasted all around the room.

"Yes," said the old school-master, observing that her attention was caught by these latter specimens, "that's beautiful writing, my dear."

"Very, sir," replied the child, modestly; "is it yours?"

"Mine!" he returned, taking out his spectacles and putting them on to have a better view of the triumphs so dear to his heart. "*I* couldn't write like that nowadays. No; they are all done by one hand—a little hand it is, not so old as yours, but a very clever one."

¹ long seats.

² cane and ruler used for punishment.

As the school-master said this, he saw that a small blot of ink had been thrown on one of the copies, so he took a pen-knife from his pocket, and going to the wall, carefully scraped it out. When he had finished, he walked slowly backward from the writing, admiring it as one might contemplate a beautiful picture, but with something of sadness in his voice and manner.

"A little hand, indeed," said the poor school-master. "Far beyond all his companions in his learning, and his sports too, how did he ever come to be so fond of me? That I should love him is no wonder, but that he should love me—"

The child was silent. He walked to the door, and looked wistfully out. The shadows of night were gathering, and all was still.

"If he could lean upon anybody's arm, he would come to me, I know," he said, returning into the room. "He always came into the garden to say good-night. But perhaps his illness has only just taken a favorable turn, and it's too late for him to come out, for it's very damp, and there's a heavy dew."

The school-master lighted a candle, fastened the window-shutter, and closed the door. But after he had done this, and sat silent for a little time, he took down his hat, and said he would go and satisfy himself if Nell would sit up till he returned. The child readily complied, and he went out.

When he returned, he took his seat in the chimney-corner, but remained silent for a long time. At length he turned to her, and speaking very gently, hoped she would say a prayer that night for a sick child.

"My favorite scholar!" said the poor school-master, looking mournfully around upon the walls. "It is a little hand to have done all that and waste away with sickness. It is a very, very little hand."

After a sound night's rest in a chamber in the thatched roof, the child rose early in the morning and descended to the room where she had supped last night. As the school-master had

already gone out, she bestirred herself to make it neat and comfortable, and had just finished when the kind host returned.

He thanked her many times, and said that the old dame who usually did such offices for him had gone to nurse the little scholar whom he had told her of. The child asked how he was, and hoped he was better.

"No," rejoined the school-master, shaking his head sorrowfully, "no better. They even say he is worse."

"I am very sorry for that, sir," said the child.

The poor school-master appeared to be gratified by her earnest manner. The child asked leave to prepare breakfast, and her grandfather coming down-stairs, they all three partook of it together. While the meal was in progress, their host remarked that the old man seemed much fatigued, and evidently stood in need of rest.

"If the journey you have before you is a long one," he said, "and don't press you for one day, you're very welcome to pass another night here. I should really be glad if you would, friend."

The old man looked at Nell, uncertain whether to accept or decline the offer.

"What are we to do, Nell?" said he; "say what we're to do, dear."

It required no great persuasion to induce the child to answer that they had better accept the invitation. She was happy to show her gratitude to the kind school-master by busying herself in the performance of such household duties as his little cottage stood in need of. When these were done, she took some needle-work from her basket, and sat herself down upon a stool beside the window, where the honeysuckle and woodbine entwined their tender stems, and stealing into the room, filled it with their delicious breath. Her grandfather was basking in the sun outside, breathing the perfume of the flowers, and idly watching the clouds as they floated on before the light summer wind.

Toward night an old woman came tottering up the garden, and meeting the school-master at the door, said he was to go to Dame West's directly, and had best run on before her. He and the child were on the point of going out together for a walk, and without relinquishing her hand, the school-master hurried away, leaving the messenger to follow as she might. They stopped at the cottage door, and the school-master knocked softly at it with his hand. It was opened without loss of time. They entered a room where a little group of women were gathered about one older than the rest, who was crying very bitterly, and sat wringing her hands and rocking herself to and fro.

"Oh, dame!" said the school-master, drawing near her chair, "is it so bad as this?"

"He's going fast," cried the old woman; "my grandson's dying. It's all along of you. That is what his learning has brought him to."

"Do not say that I am in any fault," urged the gentle school-master. "I am not hurt, dame. No, no. You are in great distress of mind, and don't mean what you say. I am sure you don't."

"I do," returned the old woman, "I mean it all. If he hadn't been poring over his books out of fear of you, he would have been well and merry now; I know he would."

Without saying a word in reply, the school-master followed the old woman who had summoned him into another room, where his infant friend, half-dressed, lay stretched upon a bed.

He was a very young boy; quite a little child. His hair still hung in curls about his face, and his eyes were very bright, but their light was of Heaven, not earth. The school-master took a seat beside him, and stooping over the pillow, whispered his name. The boy sprang up, stroked his face with his hand, and threw his wasted arms around his neck, crying out that he was his dear, kind friend.

"I hope I always was. I meant to be, God knows," said the poor school-master.

"Who is that?" said the boy, seeing Nell. "I am afraid to kiss her, lest I should make her ill. Ask her to shake hands with me."

The sobbing child came closer up, and took the little languid hand in hers. Releasing his again after a time, the sick boy laid him gently down.

"You remember the garden, Harry," whispered the school-master, "and how pleasant it used to be in the evening time? You must make haste to visit it again, for I think the very flowers have missed you, and are less gay than they used to be. You will come, soon, my dear, very soon now—won't you?"

The boy smiled faintly and moved his lips, but no voice came from them; no, not a sound.

In the silence that ensued, the hum of distant voices borne upon the evening air came floating through the open window. "What's that?" said the sick child, opening his eyes.

"The boys at play upon the green."

He took a handkerchief from his pillow, and tried to wave it above his head. But the feeble arm dropped powerless down.

"Shall I do it?" said the school-master.

"Please wave it at the window," was the faint reply. "Tie it to the lattice. Some of them may see it there. Perhaps they'll think of me, and look this way."

He raised his head, and glanced from the fluttering signal to his idle bat that lay with slate and book and other boyish property upon a table in the room. And then he laid him softly down once more, and asked if the little girl were there, for he could not see her.

She stepped forward, and pressed the passive hand that lay upon the coverlet. The two old friends and companions—for such they were, though they were man and child—held each other in a long embrace, and then the little scholar turned his face to the wall and fell asleep.

The poor school-master sat in the same place, holding the small cold hand in his, and chafing it. It was but the hand of a dead child. He felt that, and yet he chafed it still, and could not lay it down.

CHAPTER XII.

MRS. JARLEY'S WAX-WORK SHOW.

ALMOST broken-hearted, Nell withdrew with the school-master from the bedside and returned to his cottage. In the midst of her grief and tears, she was yet careful to conceal their real cause from the old man, for the boy had been a grandchild and left but one aged relative to mourn his early death.

She stole away to bed as quickly as she could. Her dreams were of the little scholar; not coffined and covered up, but mingling with angels, and smiling happily. The sun darting his cheerful rays into the room awoke her; and now there remained but to take leave of the poor school-master and wander forth once more.

By the time they were ready to depart, school had begun. The school-master rose from his desk and walked with them to the gate. With a trembling hand the child held out to him the money which a lady had given her at the races for her flowers, faltering in her thanks as she thought how small the sum was. But he bid her put it up, and stooping to kiss her cheek, turned back into his house.

They had not gone half a dozen paces when he was at the door again; the old man retraced his steps to shake hands, and the child did the same.

"Good fortune and happiness go with you!" said the poor school-master. "If you ever pass this way again, you'll not forget the little village school?"

"We shall never forget it, sir," rejoined Nell; "nor ever forget to be grateful to you for your kindness to us."

They bid him farewell very many times, and turned away, walking slowly and often looking back, until they could see him no more. At length they had left the village far behind, and even lost sight of the smoke among the trees. They trudged onward now, at a quicker pace, resolving to keep the main road, and go wherever it might lead them.

The afternoon had worn away into a beautiful evening, when they arrived at a point where the road made a sharp turn and struck across a common. On the border of this common, and close to the hedge which divided it from the cultivated fields, a caravan was drawn up to rest; upon which, by reason of its situation, they came so suddenly that they could not have avoided it if they would.

It was not a shabby, dingy, dusty cart, but a smart little house upon wheels, with white dimity curtains festooning the windows, and window-shutters of green with panels of a startling red, in which happily contrasted colors the whole concern shone brilliant. Neither was it a poor caravan drawn by a single donkey or emaciated horse, for a pair of horses in pretty good condition were released from the shafts and grazing on the frouzy grass. Neither was it a gypsy caravan, for at the open door sat a Christian lady, stout and comfortable to look upon, who wore a large bonnet trembling with bows. And that it was not an unprovided caravan was clear from this lady's occupation, which was the very pleasant and refreshing one of taking tea. The tea-things were set forth upon a drum, covered with a white napkin; and there, as if at the most convenient round-table in all the world, sat this roving lady, taking her tea and enjoying the prospect. Noting the child's anxious manner, the lady, beckoning to her to come up the steps, said, "Are you hungry, child?"

"Not very, but we are tired, and it's—it is a long way—"

"Well, hungry or not, you had better have some tea," rejoined the lady. "I suppose you are agreeable to that, old gentleman?"

The grandfather humbly pulled off his hat and thanked her. The lady then bade him come up the steps, but the drum proving an inconvenient table for two, they descended again, and sat upon the grass, where she handed down to them the tea-tray, the bread and butter, the ham, and, in short, everything of which she had partaken herself.

"Set 'em out near the hind wheels, child; that's the best place," said their friend, superintending the arrangements from above. "Now hand up the teapot for a little more hot water and a pinch of fresh tea, and then both of you eat and drink as much as you can, and don't spare anything; that's all I ask of you."

While they were thus engaged, the lady of the caravan alighted on the earth, and with her hands clasped behind her, walked up and down in a very stately manner. When she had taken this gentle exercise for some time, she sat down upon the steps and called "George;" whereupon a man in a carter's frock, who had been shrouded in a hedge up to this time, parted the twigs that concealed him, and appeared in a sitting attitude, supporting on his legs a baking-dish, and bearing in his right hand a knife, and in his left a fork.

"Have you nearly finished?"

"Wery nigh, mum." And, indeed, after scraping the dish all around with his knife and carrying the choice brown morsels to his mouth, this gentleman declared himself quite disengaged, and came forth from his retreat.

"I hope I haven't hurried you, George," said his mistress.

"If you have," returned the follower, "we must make up for it next time, that's all."

"Would these two travelers make much difference to the horses, if we took them with us?" asked his mistress, pointing to Nell and the old man.

"They'd make a difference in course," said George.

"Would they make much difference?" repeated his mistress. "They can't be very heavy."

"The weight o' the pair, mum," said George, "would be a trifle under that of Oliver Cromwell."¹

Nell was very much surprised that the man should be so accurately acquainted with the weight of one whom she had read of in books as having lived considerably before their time, but speedily forgot the subject in the joy of hearing that they were to go forward in the caravan, for which she thanked its lady with earnestness. She helped to put away the tea-things, and, the horses being by that time harnessed, mounted into the vehicle, followed by her delighted grandfather. Their patroness then shut the door and sat herself down by her drum at an open window; and, the steps being stowed under the carriage, away they went.

The lady of the caravan sat at one window, and little Nell and her grandfather sat at the other, while the machine jogged on and shifted the darkening prospect very slowly. At first the two travelers spoke little, but as they grew more familiar with the place, they ventured to converse with greater freedom, until the old man fell asleep; which the lady of the caravan observing, invited Nell to come and sit beside her.

"Well, child," she said, "how do you like this way of traveling?"

Nell replied that she thought it very pleasant indeed, to which the lady assented in the case of people who had their spirits.

"That's the happiness of you young people," she continued. "You don't know what it is to be low in your feelings. You always have your appetites, too, and what a comfort that is!"

Nell silently assented to what the lady had said, and waited until she should speak again.

Instead of speaking, however, she sat looking at the child for a long time in silence, and then getting up, brought out

¹ Lord Protector or President of the Commonwealth of Great Britain, born 1599; died 1658.

from a corner a large roll of canvas about a yard in width, which she laid upon the floor and spread open with her foot until it nearly reached from one end of the caravan to the other.

"There, child," she said, "read that."

Nell walked down it and read aloud, in enormous black letters, the inscription, "JARLEY'S WAX-WORK."

"That's me," said the lady. "I am Mrs. Jarley."

Giving the child an encouraging look, intended to let her know that, although she stood in the presence of the original Jarley, she must not allow herself to be utterly overwhelmed, the lady of the caravan unfolded another scroll, whereon was the inscription, "One hundred figures the full size of life," and then another scroll, on which was written, "The only stupendous collection of real wax-work in the world," and then several smaller scrolls with such inscriptions as, "Now exhibiting within"—"The genuine and only Jarley"—"Jarley's unrivaled collection"—"Jarley is the delight of the Nobility and the Gentry"—"The Royal Family are the patrons of Jarley." When she had exhibited these to the astonished child, she brought forth specimens of hand-bills, some of which were in the form of parodies on popular melodies, such as,

"If I know'd a donkey wot wouldn't go
To see Mrs. Jarley's wax-work show,
Do you think I'd acknowledge him?
Oh, no, no!
Then run to Jarley's—"

When she had brought all these proofs of her important position in society to bear upon her young companion, Mrs. Jarley rolled them up, and having put them carefully away, sat down again, and looked at the child in triumph.

"Is it here, ma'am?" asked Nell, whose curiosity was awakened.

"Is what here, child?"

"The wax-work, ma'am."

"Why, bless you, child, what are you thinking of? How could such a collection be here? It's gone on in the other wans¹ to the assembly-rooms, and there it'll be exhibited the day after to-morrow. You are going to the same town, and you'll see it, I dare say. What line are you in?"

"We are poor people, ma'am," returned Nell, "and are only wandering about. We have nothing to do; I wish we had."

"Lord bless me," said the lady. "I never heard of such a thing. Who'd have thought it! And yet you can read. And write too, I shouldn't wonder?"

"Yes, ma'am," said the child, fearful of giving new offense by the confession.

The lady of the caravan, summoning the driver to come under the window at which she was seated, held a long conversation with him in a low tone of voice, as if she were asking his advice on an important point. This conference at length concluded, she drew in her head again, and beckoned Nell to approach.

"And the old gentleman too," said Mrs. Jarley, "for I want to have a word with him. Do you want a good situation for your granddaughter, master? If you do, I can put her in the way of getting one."

"I can't leave her," answered the old man. "We can't separate."

"We are very thankful to you," Nell said; "but neither of us could part from the other if all the wealth of the world were halved between us."

Mrs. Jarley was a little disconcerted by this reception of her proposal. After an awkward pause, she thrust her head out of the window again and had another conference with the driver. She then addressed the grandfather again.

"If you're really disposed to employ yourself," said Mrs. Jar-

¹ vans, wagons.

ley, "there would be plenty for you to do in the way of helping to dust the figures, and take the checks, and so forth. What I want your granddaughter for is to point 'em out to the company; they would be soon learned, and she has a way with her that people wouldn't think unpleasant. I've been accustomed to go around with visitors myself, which I should keep on doing now, only that my spirits make a little ease absolutely necessary. It's not a common offer, bear in mind; it's Jarley's wax-work, remember. The duty's very light and genteel, the company particularly select, and this is an opportunity which may never occur again."

Mrs. Jarley remarked that, with reference to salary, she could pledge herself to no specific sum until she had tested Nell's abilities. But board and lodging for her and her grandfather, she bound herself to provide, and the board should always be good in quality and in quantity plentiful.

Nell and her grandfather consulted together, and while they were so engaged, Mrs. Jarley, with her hands behind her, walked up and down the caravan as she had walked after tea on the dull earth, with uncommon dignity and self-esteem.

"Now, child?" cried she, coming to a halt as Nell turned toward her.

"We are very much obliged to you, ma'am," said Nell, "and thankfully accept your offer."

"And you'll never be sorry for it," said Mrs. Jarley; "I'm pretty sure of that. So as that's all settled, let us have a bit of supper."

In the meanwhile, the caravan blundered on and came at last upon the paved streets of a town, which was clear of passengers and quiet, for it was by this time near midnight. As it was too late to repair to the exhibition-room, they turned aside into a piece of waste ground and drew up there for the night, near to another caravan which bore on the panel the great name of Jarley, and was employed in conveying from place to place the wax-work which was its country's pride.

The machine being empty (for it had deposited its burden at the place of exhibition), was assigned to the old man as his sleeping-place for the night; and within its wooden walls Nell made him up the best bed she could from the materials at hand. For herself, she was to sleep in Mrs. Jarley's own traveling-carriage as a mark of the lady's favor and confidence.

CHAPTER XIII.

NELL'S LITTLE PURSE EXHAUSTED.

SLEEP hung upon the eyelids of the child so long that, when she awoke, Mrs. Jarley was already preparing breakfast. She received Nell's apology for being so late with perfect good-humor, and said that she should not have roused her if she had slept on until noon.

The meal finished, Nell assisted to wash the cups and saucers, and put them in their proper places. Mrs. Jarley arrayed herself in a bright shawl for the purpose of making a progress through the streets of the town.

"The wan will come on to bring the boxes," said Mrs. Jarley, "and you had better come in it, child. I am obliged to walk, very much against my will; but the people expect it of me. How do I look, child?"

Nell returned a satisfactory reply, and Mrs. Jarley, after sticking a great many pins in various parts of her figure, was at last satisfied with her appearance, and went forth majestically. The caravan followed at no great distance. It stopped at the place of exhibition, where Nell dismounted amid an admiring group of children. The chests were taken out and carried into the hall, to be unlocked by Mrs. Jarley, who, attended by George and another man in velveteen shorts¹ and a drab hat, were waiting to dispose of their contents (con-

¹ trousers reaching to the knee.

sisting of red festoons and other ornamental devices) to the best advantage in the decoration of the room.

When the festoons were all put up as tastily as they might be, the stupendous collection was uncovered, and there were displayed, on a raised platform some two feet from the floor, running around the room and parted from the public by a crimson rope, breast high, divers sprightly figures of celebrated characters, singly and in groups, clad in glittering dresses of various climes and times, and standing with their eyes very wide open. When Nell had exhausted her first raptures at this glorious sight, Mrs. Jarley ordered the room to be cleared of all but herself and the child, and, sitting herself down in an armchair in the center, formally invested Nell with a willow wand, long used by herself for pointing out the characters, and was at great pains to instruct her in her duty.

"That," said Mrs. Jarley in her exhibition tone, as Nell touched a figure at the beginning of the platform, "'is an unfortunate maid of honor in the time of Queen Elizabeth,'¹ who died from pricking her finger in consequence of working upon a Sunday. Observe the blood which is trickling from her finger; also the gold-eyed needle of the period, with which she is at work."

All this Nell repeated twice or thrice, pointing to the finger and the needle at the right times, and then passed on to the next.

"That, ladies and gentlemen," said Mrs. Jarley, "'is Jasper Packlemerton, who married fourteen wives, and destroyed them all by tickling the soles of their feet when they were sleeping. On being brought to the scaffold and asked if he was sorry for what he had done, he replied yes, he was sorry for having let 'em off so easy, and hoped all Christian husbands would pardon him the offense.'"

When Nell knew all about Mr. Packlemerton, and could say it without faltering, Mrs. Jarley passed on to the fat man,

¹ Queen of England from 1558 to 1603.

and then to the thin man, the tall man, the short man, the old lady who died of dancing at a hundred and thirty-two, and other historical characters and interesting individuals. And so well did Nell profit by her instructions, and so apt was she to remember them, that by the time they had been shut up together for a couple of hours she was in full possession of the history of the whole establishment, and perfectly competent to the enlightenment of visitors.

Mrs. Jarley was not slow to express her admiration at this happy result, and carried her young friend and pupil to inspect the remaining arrangements within-doors, by virtue of which the passage had been already converted into a grove of green baize hung with the inscriptions she had already seen, and a highly ornamented table placed at the upper end for Mrs. Jarley herself, at which she was to preside and take the money. The preparations without-doors had not been neglected either; a brigand with the blackest possible head of hair and the clearest possible complexion was at that moment going around the town in a cart, consulting the miniature of a lady.

Mrs. Jarley had an inventive genius. In the midst of the various devices for attracting visitors to the exhibition, little Nell was not forgotten. The light cart in which the brigand usually made his perambulations being gayly dressed with flags and streamers, Nell was accommodated with a seat beside him, decorated with artificial flowers, and in this state, rode slowly through the town every morning, to the sound of drum and trumpet. The beauty of the child produced quite a sensation in the little country place. The brigand, heretofore a source of exclusive interest in the streets, became a mere secondary consideration. Grown-up folks began to be interested in the bright-eyed girl, and some score of little boys fell desperately in love, and constantly left inclosures of nuts and apples at the wax-work door.

This desirable impression was not lost on Mrs. Jarley, who,

lest Nell should become too cheap, had sent the brigand out alone again, and kept her in the exhibition-room, where she described the figures every half hour, to the great satisfaction of admiring audiences.

Although her duties were sufficiently laborious, Nell found in the lady of the caravan a very kind and considerate person, who had not only a peculiar relish for being comfortable herself, but for making everybody about her comfortable also. As her popularity procured her various little fees from the visitors, and as her grandfather, too, was well treated and useful, she had no cause of anxiety in connection with the wax-work.

One evening, a holiday night with them, Nell and her grandfather went out to walk. The weather being warm, they strolled a long distance. Clear of the town, they took a foot-path which struck through some pleasant fields, judging that it would terminate in the road they quitted and enable them to return that way. It made, however, a much wider circuit than they had supposed, and thus they were tempted onward until sunset, when they reached the track of which they were in search, and stopped to rest.

It had been gradually getting overcast, and now the sky was dark and lowering, save where the glory of the departing sun piled up masses of gold and burning fire, which gleamed here and there through the black veil, and shone redly down upon the earth. Large drops of rain began to fall, and, as the storm-clouds came sailing onward, others supplied the void they left behind and spread all over the sky.

The old man and the child hurried along the high-road, hoping to find some house in which they could seek a refuge from the storm, which had now burst forth in earnest, and every moment increased in violence. Drenched with the pelt-ing rain, they would have passed a solitary house without being aware of its vicinity, had not a man, who was standing at the door, called lustily to them to enter.

"What were you going past for, eh?" he said, as he

closed the door and led the way along a passage to a room behind.

"We didn't see the house, sir, till we heard you calling," Nell replied.

"No wonder," said the man, "with this lightning in one's eyes, by the bye. You had better stand by the fire here, and dry yourselves a bit. You can call for what you like, if you want anything. If you don't want anything, you are not obliged to give an order. This is a public-house, that's all. The Valiant Soldier is pretty well known hereabouts."

"Is this house called the Valiant Soldier, sir?" asked Nell.

"I thought everybody knew that," replied the landlord. "Where have you come from, if you don't know the Valiant Soldier? This is the Valiant Soldier, by James Groves—hon-est Jem Groves, as is a man of unblemished moral character, and has a good dry skittle-ground."

The night being warm, there was a large screen drawn across the room, for a barrier against the heat of the fire. It seemed as if somebody on the other side of this screen had been insinuating doubts of Mr. Groves's prowess.

"There ain't many men," said Mr. Groves, "who would venture to cross Jem Groves under his own roof. There's only one man I know, that has nerve enough for that, and that man's not a hundred mile from here neither."

In return for this complimentary address, a very gruff, hoarse voice bade Mr. Groves "hold his nose and light a candle."

"Nell, they're—they're playing cards," whispered the old man, suddenly interested. "Don't you hear them?"

"Look sharp with that candle," said the voice; "it's as much as I can do to see the pips¹ on the cards as it is; and get the shutter closed as quick as you can, will you? Game! Seven-and-sixpence to me, old Isaac. Hand over."

"Do you hear, Nell; do you hear them?" whispered the old

¹ spots.

man again, with increased earnestness, as the money chinked upon the table.

"I haven't seen such a storm as this," said a sharp voice, when a tremendous peal of thunder had died away, "since the night when old Luke Withers won thirteen times running on the red."

"Ah!" returned the gruff voice, "for all old Luke's winning through thick and thin of late years, I remember the time when he was the unluckiest of men. He never held a card but he was plucked and cleaned out completely."

"Do you hear what he says?" whispered the old man. "Do you hear that, Nell?"

The child saw with alarm that his whole appearance had undergone a complete change. His face was flushed; his eyes were strained, and the hand he laid upon her arm trembled so violently that she shook beneath its grasp.

"I always said it," he muttered; "I knew it, dreamed of it, felt it was the truth, and it must be so! What money have we, Nell? Come! I saw you with money yesterday. Give it to me."

"No, no, let me keep it, grandfather," said the frightened child. "Let us go away from here. Do not mind the rain. Pray let us go!"

"Give it to me, I say," returned the old man, fiercely. "Hush, hush! don't cry, Nell. If I spoke sharply, dear, I didn't mean it. It's for thy good. Where is the money?"

"Do not take it," said the child. "Pray do not take it, dear. For both our sakes, let me keep it, or let me throw it away—better let me throw it away, than you take it now. Let us go; do let us go."

"Give me the money," returned the old man; "I must have it. There—there—that's my dear Nell. I'll right thee one day, child, I'll right thee, never fear."

She took from her pocket a little purse. He seized it with

impatience, and hastily made his way to the other side of the screen. The trembling child followed close behind.

The landlord had placed a light upon the table, and was engaged in drawing the curtain of the window. The speakers whom they had heard were two men, who had a pack of cards and some silver money between them, while upon the screen itself the games they had played were scored in chalk. The man with the rough voice was a burly fellow of middle age, with large black whiskers. He had beside him a thick knotted stick. The other man, whom his companion had called Isaac, was of a more slender figure, with a very ill-favored face, and a most villainous squint.

"Now, old gentleman," said Isaac, looking around, "do you know either of us? This side of the screen is private, sir."

"No offense, I hope," returned the old man.

"But there is offense," said the other, interrupting him, "when you intrude yourself upon a couple of gentlemen who are particularly engaged."

"I had no intention to offend," said the old man, looking anxiously at the cards, shaking the little purse in his eager hand, and then throwing it down upon the table.

"Oh, that, indeed!" said Isaac. "If that's what the gentleman means, I beg the gentleman's pardon."

"We'll make a four-handed game of it, and take in Groves," said the stout man. "Come, Jemmy."

The landlord, who conducted himself like one who was well used to such little parties, approached the table and took his seat. The child, in a perfect agony, drew her grandfather aside, and implored him, even then, to come away.

"Come; and we may be so happy," said the child.

"We *will* be happy," replied the old man, hastily. "Let me go, Nell. The means of happiness are on the cards and dice. We must rise from little winnings to great. There's little to be won here; but great will come in time. I shall but win back my own, and it's all for thee, my darling."

"God help us!" cried the child. "Oh! what hard fortune brought us here?"

"Now, mister," said the stout man, "if you're not coming yourself, give us the cards, will you?"

"I am coming," cried the old man. "Sit thee down, Nell; sit thee down, and look on. Be of good heart; it's all for thee—all—every penny."

As he spoke, he drew a chair to the table; and the other three closing around it at the same time, the game commenced.

The child sat by and watched its progress with a troubled mind. Regardless of the run of luck, and mindful only of the desperate passion which had its hold upon her grandfather, losses and gains were to her alike. Exulting in some brief triumph, or cast down by a defeat, there he sat, so wild and restless, so terribly eager, so ravenous for the paltry stakes, that she could have almost better borne to see him dead. And yet she was the innocent cause of all this torture, and he, gambling with such a savage thirst for gain, had not one selfish thought.

At length the play came to an end, and Mr. Isaac List rose the only winner. Nell's little purse was exhausted; but although it lay empty by his side, and the other players had now risen from the table, the old man sat poring over the cards, dealing them as they had been dealt before, and turning up the different hands to see what each man would have held if they had still been playing. He was quite absorbed in this occupation, when the child drew near and laid her hand upon his shoulder, telling him it was near midnight.

"See the curse of poverty, Nell," he said, pointing to the packs he had spread out upon the table. "If I could have gone on a little longer, only a little longer, the luck would have turned on my side. Yes, it is as plain as the marks upon the cards."

"Put them away," urged the child. "Try to forget them."

"No, no, Nell," said the old man, patting her cheek;

"they must not be forgotten. We must make amends for this as soon as we can. Patience—patience, and we'll right thee yet. Come, I am ready."

"Do you know what the time is?" said Mr. Groves, who was smoking with his friends. "Past twelve o'clock—"

"It's very late," said the uneasy child. "I wish we had gone before. What will they think of us? What would it cost, sir, if we stopped here?"

"Two good beds, one-and-sixpence; supper, one shilling; total, two shillings and sixpence," replied the Valiant Soldier.

Now, Nell had still the piece of gold sewed in her dress, and when she came to consider the lateness of the hour she decided to remain. She therefore took her grandfather aside, and telling him that she had still enough left to defray the cost of their lodging, proposed that they should stay there for the night.

"If I had had but that money before—if I had only known of it a few minutes ago!" muttered the old man.

"We will decide to stop here, if you please," said Nell, turning hastily to the landlord.

Mr. Groves brought in the bread and cheese and bid his guests fall to and make themselves at home. Nell and her grandfather eat sparingly, for both were occupied with their own reflections. As she felt the necessity of concealing her little hoard from her grandfather, and had to change the piece of gold, she took it secretly from its place of concealment, and embraced an opportunity of following the landlord when he went out of the room, and tendered it to him in the little bar.

"Will you give me the change here, if you please?" said the child.

The coin being genuine, he counted out the change, and gave it to her. The child was returning to the room where they had passed the evening, when she fancied she saw a figure just gliding in at the door. There was nothing but a long dark passage between this door and the place where she had changed the money, and, being very certain that no person

had passed in or out while she stood there, the thought struck her that she had been watched. She was still wondering and thinking of it when a girl came to light her to bed.

The old man took leave of the company at the same time, and they went upstairs together. It was a great, rambling house, with wide staircases which the flaring candles seemed to make more gloomy. She left her grandfather in his chamber, and followed her guide to another, which was at the end of a passage, and approached by some half dozen crazy steps. This was prepared for her.

The child did not feel comfortable when she was left alone. She could not help thinking of the figure stealing through the passage down-stairs. At last, sleep gradually stole upon her—a broken, fitful sleep, troubled by dreams of falling from high towers, and waking with a start and in great terror. A deeper slumber followed this—and then—what? That figure in the room. A figure was there. She had no voice to cry for help, but lay still, watching it.

On it came—on, silently and stealthily, to the bed's head, the breath so near her pillow that she shrunk back into it, lest those wandering hands should light upon her face. Back again it stole to the window—then turned its head toward her.

The dark form was a mere blot upon the lighter darkness of the room, but she saw the turning of the head, and felt and knew how the eyes looked and the ears listened. There it remained, motionless as she. At length, still keeping the face toward her, it busied its hands in something, and she heard the chink of money.

Then it came on again, silent and stealthy as before, and replacing the garments it had taken from the bedside, dropped upon its hands and knees, and crawled away.

The first impulse of the child was to fly from the terror of being herself in that room—to have somebody by—not to be alone—and then her power of speech would be restored. With no consciousness of having moved, she gained the door.

There was the dreadful shadow pausing at the bottom of the steps.

She could not pass it; she might have done so, perhaps, in the darkness without being seized, but her blood curdled at the thought. The figure stood quite still, and so did she; not boldly, but of necessity, for going back into the room was hardly less terrible than going on.

The rain beat fast and furiously without, and ran down in splashing streams from the thatched roof. The figure moved again. The child involuntarily did the same. Once in her grandfather's room, she would be safe.

It crept along the passage until it came to the very door she longed so ardently to reach. The child, in the agony of being so near, had almost darted forward with the design of bursting into the room and closing it behind her, when the figure stopped again.

The idea flashed suddenly upon her—what if it entered there, and had a design upon the old man's life? She turned faint and sick. It did. It went in. There was a light inside. The figure was now within the chamber, and she, still dumb—quite dumb, and almost senseless—stood looking on.

The door was partly open. Not knowing what she meant to do, but meaning to preserve him or be killed herself, she staggered forward and looked in.

What sight was that which met her view?

The bed had not been lain on, but was smooth and empty. And at a table sat the old man himself—the only living creature there; his white face pinched and sharpened by the greediness which made his eyes unnaturally bright—counting the money of which his hands had robbed her.

With steps more faltering and unsteady than those with which she had approached the room, the child withdrew from the door, groped her way back to her own chamber, and sat up during the remainder of that long, long, miserable night.

At last the day turned her waning candle pale, and she fell

asleep. She was quickly roused by the girl who had shown her up to bed; and, as soon as she was dressed, prepared to go down to her grandfather. But first she searched her pocket and found that her money was all gone—not a sixpence remained.

The old man was ready, and in a few seconds they were on their road. The child thought he rather avoided her eye.

“Grandfather,” she said, in a tremulous voice, after they had walked about a mile in silence, “do you think they are honest people at the house yonder?”

“Why?” returned the old man, trembling. “Do I think them honest? Yes, they played honestly.”

“I’ll tell you why I ask,” rejoined Nell. “I lost some money last night—out of my bedroom, I am sure. Unless it was taken by somebody in jest—only in jest, dear grandfather, which would make me laugh heartily if I could but know it—”

“Who would take money in jest?” returned the old man in a hurried manner. “Those who take money take it to keep. Don’t talk of jest.”

“Then it was stolen out of my room, dear,” said the child, whose last hope was destroyed by the manner of this reply.

“But is there no more, Nell?” said the old man; “no more anywhere? Was it all taken—every farthing of it—was there nothing left?”

“Nothing,” replied the child.

“We must get more,” said the old man; “we must earn it, Nell, hoard it up, scrape it together, come by it somehow. Never mind this loss. Tell nobody of it, and perhaps we may regain it.”

The child hung down her head and wept.

“Not a word about it to any one but me,” said the old man, “no, not even to me,” he added, hastily; “for it can do no good. All the losses that ever were are not worth tears from thy eyes, darling. Why should they be, when we will win them back?”

“Let them go,” said the child, looking up. “Let them go once and forever, and I would never shed another tear if every penny had been a thousand pounds.”

When they presented themselves in the midst of the stupendous collection, they found, as Nell had anticipated, that Mrs. Jarley was not yet out of bed, and that, although she had suffered some uneasiness on their account overnight, and had indeed sat up for them until past eleven o'clock, she had retired in the persuasion that, being overtaken by the storm at some distance from home, they had sought the nearest shelter, and would not return before morning. Nell immediately applied herself with great assiduity to the decoration and preparation of the room, and had the satisfaction of completing her task and dressing herself neatly before the beloved of the Royal Family came down to breakfast.

CHAPTER XIV.

NELL SAVES THE OLD MAN.

THAT evening, as Nell had dreaded, her grandfather stole away, and did not come back until the night was far spent. Worn out as she was, and fatigued in mind and body, she sat up alone, counting the minutes, until he returned—penniless, broken-spirited, and wretched, but still hotly bent upon his infatuation.

“Get me money,” he said, wildly, as they parted for the night. “I must have money, Nell. It shall be paid thee back with interest one day, but all the money that comes into thy hands must be mine—not for myself, but to use for thee. Remember, Nell, to use for thee!”

What could the child do, with the knowledge she had, but give him every penny that came into her hands, lest he should be tempted on to rob their benefactress? If she told the truth (so thought the child), he would be treated as a madman; if

she did not supply him with money, he would supply himself; supplying him, she fed the fire that burned him up, and put him perhaps beyond recovery. Distracted by these thoughts, borne down by the weight of the sorrow which she dared not tell, the color forsook her cheek, her eye grew dim, and her heart was oppressed and heavy. All her old sorrows had come back upon her, augmented by new fears and doubts; by day they were ever present to her mind; by night they hovered round her pillow, and haunted her in dreams.

In one of those wanderings at the quiet hour of twilight, when the sky, and earth, and air, and rippling water, and sound of distant bells claimed kindred with the emotions of the solitary child—in one of those rambles which had now become her only pleasure or relief from care, light had faded into darkness and evening deepened into night, and still the young creature lingered in the gloom; feeling a companionship in Nature so serene and still, when noise of tongues and glare of garish lights would have been solitude indeed.

The child sat silently beneath a tree, hushed in her very breath by the stillness of the night, and all its attendant wonders. The time and place awoke reflection, and she thought with a quiet hope—less hope, perhaps, than resignation—on the past, and present, and what was yet before her.

Between the old man and herself there had come a gradual separation, harder to bear than any former sorrow. Every evening, and often in the day-time, too, he was absent, alone; and although she well knew where he went, and why—too well from the constant drain upon her scanty purse and from his haggard looks—he evaded all inquiry, maintained a strict reserve, and even shunned her presence.

She sat meditating sorrowfully upon this change, and mingling it, as it were, with everything about her, when the distant church-clock bell struck nine. Rising at the sound, she retraced her steps, and turned thoughtfully toward the town.

She had gained a little wooden bridge, which, thrown across the stream, led into a meadow in her way, when she came suddenly upon a ruddy light, and looking forward, discerned that it proceeded from what appeared to be an encampment of gypsies, who had made a fire at no great distance from the path, and were sitting or lying around it.

A movement of timid curiosity impelled her, when she approached the spot, to glance toward the fire. There was a form between it and her which caused her to stop abruptly. Then, as if assured that it could not be the person she had supposed, she went on again.

But at that instant the conversation, whatever it was, which had been carried on near this fire, was resumed, and the tones of the voice that spoke sounded as familiar to her as her own. She turned, and looked back. The person had been seated before, but was now in a standing posture, and leaning forward on a stick on which he rested both hands. The attitude was no less familiar to her than the tone of voice had been. It *was* her grandfather.

Her first impulse was to call to him; her next to wonder who his associates could be, and for what purpose they were together. Some vague apprehension succeeded, and, yielding to the strong inclination it awakened, she drew nearer to the place. She advanced within a few feet of the fire, and standing among a few young trees, could both see and hear, without much danger of being observed.

There were no women or children, as she had seen in other gypsy camps, and but one gypsy—a tall, athletic man, who stood with his arms folded, looking now at the fire, and now, under his black eyelashes, at three other men who were there, with a watchful but half-concealed interest in their conversation. Of these, her grandfather was one; the others she recognized as the first card-players at the public-house on the eventful night of the storm, the man whom they had called Isaac List, and his gruff companion.

"Well, are you going?" said the stout man, looking up from the ground where he was lying at his ease, into her grandfather's face. "You were in a mighty hurry a minute ago. Go, if you like. You're your own master, I hope?"

"Don't vex him," returned Isaac List; "he didn't mean any offense."

"You keep me poor, and plunder me, and make a sport and jest of me besides," said the old man, turning from one to the other. "Ye'll drive me mad among ye."

"Confound you, what do you mean?" said the stout man. "Keep *you* poor! You'd keep us poor if you could, wouldn't you? That's the way with you whining, puny, pitiful players. When you lose, you're martyrs; but I don't find that when you win, you look upon the other losers in that light. If you're persuaded that it's time for luck to turn, as it certainly is, and find that you haven't means enough to try it, help yourself to what seems put in your way on purpose. Borrow it, I say, and when you're able, pay it back again."

"Certainly," Isaac List struck in; "if this good lady as keeps the wax-work has money, and does keep it in a tin box when she goes to bed, and doesn't lock her door for fear of fire, it seems an easy thing."

"You see, Isaac," said his friend, Mr. Jowl, drawing himself closer to the old man, "strangers are going in and out every hour of the day; nothing would be more likely than for one of these strangers to get under the good lady's bed, or lock himself in the cupboard; suspicion would be very wide, and would fall a long way from the mark, no doubt. I'd give him his revenge to the last farthing he brought, whatever the amount was."

"But could you?" urged Isaac List. "Is your bank strong enough?"

"Strong enough?" answered the other, with assumed disdain. "Here, you, sir, give me that box out of the straw!"

This was addressed to the gypsy, who crawled into a low

tent on all fours, and after some rummaging and rustling returned with a cash-box, which the man who had spoken opened with a key he wore about his person.

"Do you see this?" he said, gathering up the money in his hand and letting it drop back into the box, between his fingers, like water. "Do you hear it? Do you know the sound of gold? There, put it back—and don't talk about banks again, Isaac, till you've got one of your own."

"Ah!" cried Isaac, rapturously, "the pleasures of winning! The delight of picking up the money and sweeping 'em into one's pocket! The deliciousness of having a triumph at last, and thinking that one didn't stop short and turn back, but went half-way to meet it! The—but you're not going, old gentleman?"

"I'll do it," said the old man, who had risen and taken two or three hurried steps away, and now returned as hurriedly. "I'll have it, every penny."

"Why, that's brave," cried Isaac, jumping up and slapping him on the shoulder; "and I respect you for having so much young blood left."

"He gives me my revenge, mind," said the old man, pointing to him, eagerly, with his shriveled hand; "mind—he stakes coin against coin, down to the last one in the box, be there many or few. Remember that!"

"I'm witness," returned Isaac. "I'll see fair between you."

"I have passed my word," said Jowl, "and I'll keep it. When does this match come off? I wish it was over. To-night?"

"I must have the money first," said the old man; "and that I'll have to-morrow—"

"Why not to-night?" urged Jowl.

"It's late now, and I should be flushed and flurried," said the old man. "It must be softly done. No, to-morrow night."

"Then to-morrow be it," said Jowl.

"God be merciful to us!" cried the child within herself, "and help us in this trying hour! What shall I do to save him?"

The remainder of their conversation was carried on in a lower tone of voice, and was sufficiently concise; relating merely to the execution of the project, and the best precautions for diverting suspicion. The old man shook hands with his tempters and withdrew.

They watched his bowed and stooping figure as it retreated slowly, and when he turned his head to look back, which he often did, waved their hands, or shouted some brief encouragement. It was not until they had seen him gradually diminish into a mere speck upon the distant road, that they turned to each other, and ventured to laugh aloud.

"So," said Jowl, warming his hands at the fire, "it's done at last. He wanted more persuading than I expected. It's three weeks ago since we first put this in his head. What'll he bring, do you think?"

"Whatever he brings, it's halved between us," returned Isaac List.

The other man nodded. "We must make quick work of it," he said, "and then cut his acquaintance, or we may be suspected. Sharp's the word."

When they had all three amused themselves a little with their victim's infatuation,¹ they dismissed the subject as one which had been sufficiently discussed, and began to talk in a jargon which the child did not understand. As their discourse appeared to relate to matters in which they were warmly interested, however, she deemed it the best time for her escaping unobserved; and crept away with slow and cautious steps, keeping in the shadow of the hedges, or forcing a path through them or the dry ditches, until she could emerge upon the road at a point beyond their range of vision. Then she fled homeward as quickly as she could, and threw herself upon her bed distracted.

¹ extravagant folly.

The first idea that flashed upon her mind was flight, instant flight; dragging him from that place, and rather dying of want upon the road-side, than ever exposing him again to such terrible temptations. Then she remembered that the crime was not to be committed until next night, and there was time for thinking, and resolving what to do. Then she was distracted with a horrible fear that he might be committing it at that moment; with a dread of hearing shrieks and cries piercing the silence of the night; with fearful thoughts of what he might be tempted and led on to do, if he were detected in the act, and had but a woman to struggle with. It was impossible to bear such torture. She stole to the room where the money was, opened the door, and looked in. God be praised! He was not there, and she was sleeping soundly.

She went back to her own room, and tried to prepare herself for bed. But who could sleep—sleep! who could lie passively down, distracted by such terror? Half undressed, and with her hair in wild disorder, she flew to the old man's bedside, clasped him by the wrist, and roused him from his sleep.

"What's this?" he cried, starting up in bed, and fixing his eyes upon her face.

"I have had a dreadful dream," said the child, "a dreadful, horrible dream. I have had it once before. It is a dream of gray-haired men like you, in darkened rooms by night, robbing sleepers of their gold. Up, up!" The old man shook in every joint, and folded his hands like one who prays.

"Not to me," said the child, "not to me—to Heaven, to save us from such deeds! This dream is too real. I cannot sleep, I cannot stay here, I cannot leave you alone under the roof where such dreams come. Up! we must fly!"

He looked at her as if she were a spirit, and trembled more and more.

"There is no time to lose; I will not lose one minute," said the child. "Up! and away with me!"

"To-night?" murmured the old man.

"Yes, to-night," replied the child. "To-morrow night will be too late. The dream will have come again. Nothing but flight can save us. Up!"

The old man rose from his bed, his forehead bedewed with the cold sweat of fear, and, bending before the child as if she had been an angel messenger sent to lead him where she would, made ready to follow her. She took him by the hand, and led him on. As they passed the door of the room he had proposed to rob, she shuddered and looked up into his face. What a white face was that, and with what a look did he meet hers!

She took him to her own chamber, and still holding him by the hand, as if she feared to lose him for an instant, gathered together the little stock she had, and hung her basket on her arm. The old man took his wallet from her hand and strapped it on his shoulders—his staff, too, she had brought away—and then she led him forth.

Through the straight streets, and narrow crooked outskirts, their trembling feet passed quickly. Up the steep hill, too, crowned by the old gray castle, they toiled with rapid steps, and had not once looked behind.

But as they drew nearer the ruined walls, the moon rose in all her gentle glory, and, from their venerable age, garlanded with ivy, moss, and waving grass, the child looked back upon the sleeping town, deep in the valley's shade; and on the far-off river with its winding track of light; and on the distant hills; and as she did so, she clasped the hand she held, less firmly, and bursting into tears, fell upon the old man's neck.

"I have saved him," she thought. "In all dangers and distresses I will remember that."

CHAPTER XV.

THE LAST PENNY.

THE night crept on apace, the moon went down, the stars grew pale and dim, and morning, cold as they, slowly approached. Then, from behind a distant hill, the noble sun rose up, driving the mist in phantom shapes before it. When it had climbed higher into the sky, and there was warmth in its cheerful beams, they laid them down to sleep upon a bank hard by some water.

But Nell retained her grasp upon the old man's arm, and, long after he was slumbering soundly, watched him with untiring eyes. Fatigue stole over her at last; her grasp relaxed, tightened, relaxed again, and they slept side by side.

A confused sound of voices, mingling with her dreams, awoke her. A man of very rough appearance was standing over them, and two of his companions were looking on, from a long, heavy boat which had come close to the bank while they were sleeping. The boat had neither oar nor sail, but was towed by a couple of horses, who, with the rope to which they were harnessed, were resting on the path.

"Halloo," said the man, roughly. "What's the matter here?"

"We were only asleep, sir," said Nell. "We have been walking all night."

"A pair of queer travelers to be walking all night," observed the man who had first accosted them.

"Where have you come from?" was the next question; and this being an easier one to answer, Nell mentioned the name of the village in which their friend the school-master dwelt, as being less likely to be known to the men or to provoke further inquiry.

"I thought somebody had been robbing and ill-using you, might be," said the man. "That's all. Good-day."

Returning his salute, and feeling greatly relieved by his departure, Nell looked after him as he mounted one of the horses, and the boat went on. It had not gone very far when it stopped again, and she saw the men beckoning to her.

"Did you call me?" said Nell, running up to them.

"You may go with us if you like," replied one of those in the boat.

The child hesitated for a moment. Thinking that the men whom she had seen with her grandfather might, perhaps, follow them, and that if they went with these men, all traces of them must surely be lost at that spot, she determined to accept the offer. The boat came close to the bank again, and before she had any more time for consideration, she and her grandfather were on board, and gliding smoothly down the canal.

Nell was rather disheartened when they stopped at a kind of wharf late in the afternoon, to learn from one of the men that they would not reach their place of destination until the next day, and that if she had no provisions with her, she had better buy them there. She had but a few pence, having already bargained with them for some bread; but even of these it was necessary to be very careful, as they were on their way to an utterly strange placè, with no resource whatever. A small loaf and a morsel of cheese, therefore, were all she could afford, and with these she took her place in the boat again, and, after half an hour's delay, proceeded on the journey.

By the time it was night again, though the child felt cold, being but poorly clad, her anxious thoughts were far removed from her own suffering or uneasiness, and busily engaged in endeavoring to devise some scheme for their joint subsistence. The same spirit which had supported her on the previous night, upheld and sustained her now. Her grandfather lay sleeping safely at her side, and the crime to which madness urged him was not committed. That was her comfort.

At length the morning dawned. It was no sooner light

than it began to rain heavily. As the child could not endure the intolerable vapors of the cabin, they covered her with some pieces of sail-cloth and ends of tarpaulin, which sufficed to keep her tolerably dry and to shelter her grandfather besides. As the day advanced the rain increased. At noon it poured down more hopelessly and heavily than ever, without the faintest promise of abatement.

They had, for some time, been gradually approaching the place for which they were bound. The water had become thicker and dirtier; other barges, coming from it, passed them frequently; the paths of coal-ash and huts of staring brick marked the vicinity of some great manufacturing town. Now, the clustered roofs and piles of buildings, trembling with the working of engines, and dimly resounding with their shrieks and throbings; the tall chimneys vomiting forth a black vapor, which hung in a dense, ill-favored cloud above the house-tops, announced the termination of their journey.

The boat floated into the wharf to which it belonged. The men were occupied directly. The child and her grandfather, after waiting in vain to thank them, or ask them whither they should go, passed through a dirty lane into a crowded street.

The throng of people hurried by in two opposite streams, with no symptom of cessation or exhaustion, while the two poor strangers, stunned and bewildered by the hurry they beheld, looked mournfully on. They withdrew into a low archway for shelter from the rain, and watched the faces of those who passed, to find in none among them a ray of encouragement or hope. After some time they left their place of refuge from the weather, and mingled with the concourse.

Evening came on. They were still wandering up and down with fewer people about them, but with the same sense of solitude in their own breasts, and the same indifference from all around. The lights in the streets and shops made them feel yet more desolate, for with their help, night and darkness seemed to come on faster.

The child had not only to endure the hardships of their destitute condition, but to bear the reproaches of her grandfather, who began to murmur at having been led away from their late abode, and demand that they should return to it.

"We must sleep in the open air to-night, dear," said the child in a weak voice; "and to-morrow we will beg our way to some quiet part of the country, and try to earn our bread in very humble work."

"Why did you bring me here?" returned the old man, fiercely. "I cannot bear these close eternal streets. We came from a quiet part. Why did you force me to leave it?"

"Because I must have that dream I told you of, no more," said the child, "and we must live among poor people, or it will come again. Dear grandfather, you are old and weak, I know; but look at me. I never will complain if you will not, but I have some suffering indeed."

"Ah! poor, houseless, wandering, motherless child!" cried the old man, clasping his hands, and gazing, as if for the first time, upon her anxious face, her travel-stained dress, and bruised and swollen feet; "has all my agony of care brought her to this at last? Was I a happy man once, and have I lost happiness and all I had for this?"

"If we were in the country now," said the child, with assumed cheerfulness, as they walked on, looking about them for a shelter, "we should find some good old tree, stretching out his green arms, as if he loved us, and nodding and rustling as if he would have us fall asleep, thinking of him while he watched. Please God, we shall be there soon. And here's a deep old door-way—very dark, but quite dry, and warm, too, for the wind don't blow in here—What's that?"

Uttering a half shriek, she recoiled from a black figure which came suddenly out of the dark recess in which they were about to take refuge, and stood still looking at them.

"Speak again," it said; "do I know the voice?"

"No," replied the child, timidly; "we are strangers, and

having no money for a night's lodging, we're going to rest here."

There was a feeble lamp at no great distance; the only one in the place, which was a kind of square yard, but sufficient to show how poor and mean it was. To this the figure beckoned them; at the same time drawing within its rays, as if to show that it had no desire to conceal itself or take them at an advantage.

The form was that of a man miserably clad, and begrimed with smoke, which, by its contrast with the natural color of his skin, made him look paler than he really was.

"How came you to think of resting here?" he said; "or how," he added, looking more attentively at the child, "do you come to want a place of rest at this time of night?"

"Our misfortunes," the grandfather answered, "are the cause."

"Do you know," said the man, looking still more earnestly at Nell, "how wet she is, and that the damp streets are not a place for her?"

"I know it well, God help me!" he replied. "What can I do?"

The man looked at Nell again, and gently touched her garments, from which the rain was running off in little streams. "I can give you warmth," he said, after a pause; "nothing else. Such lodging as I have is in that house," pointing to the door-way from which he had emerged, "but she is safer and better there than here. The fire is in a rough place, but you can pass the night beside it safely, if you'll trust yourselves to me. You see that red light yonder?"

They raised their eyes, and saw a lurid glare hanging in the dark sky, the dull reflection of some distant fire.

"It's not far," said the man. "Shall I take you there? You were going to sleep upon cold bricks; I can give you a bed of warm ashes—nothing better."

Without waiting for any further reply than he saw in

their looks, he took Nell in his arms and bade the old man follow.

"This is the place," he said, pausing at a door to put Nell down and take her hand. "Don't be afraid. There's nobody here will harm you."

It needed a strong confidence in this assurance to induce them to enter, and what they saw inside did not diminish their apprehension and alarm. In a large and lofty building, supported by pillars of iron, echoing to the roof with the beating of hammers and roar of furnaces, a number of men labored like giants. Others, reposing upon heaps of coals or ashes, with their faces turned to the black vault above, slept or rested from their toil. Others again, opening the white-hot furnace doors, cast fuel on the flames, which came rushing and roaring forth to meet it, and licked it up like oil.

Through these bewildering sights and deafening sounds their conductor led them to where one furnace burned by night and day. The man who had been watching this fire, and whose task was ended for the present, gladly withdrew, and left them with their friend, who, spreading Nell's little cloak upon a heap of ashes, and showing her where he could hang her outer clothes to dry, signed to her and the old man to lie down and sleep.

The warmth of her bed, hard and humble as it was, combined with the great fatigue she had undergone, soon caused the tumult of the place to fall with a gentler sound upon the child's tired ears, and was not long in lulling her to sleep. The old man was stretched beside her, and with her hand upon his neck, she lay and dreamed. When she awoke, broad day was shining through the lofty openings in the walls, and, stealing in slanting rays but midway down, seemed to make the building darker than it had been at night. The clang and tumult were still going on, and the fires were burning fiercely as before; for few changes of night and day brought rest or quiet there.

Her friend parted his breakfast—a scanty mess of coffee and some coarse bread—with the child and her grandfather, and inquired whither they were going. She told him that they sought some distant country-place remote from towns or even other villages, and with a faltering tongue inquired what road they would do best to take.

“I know little of the country,” he said, shaking his head, “for such as I pass all our lives before our furnace doors, and seldom go forth to breathe. But there *are* such places yonder.”

“And far from here?” said Nell.

“Ay, surely. How could they be near us, and be green and fresh? The road lies, too, through miles and miles, all lighted up by fires like ours—a strange, black road, and one that would frighten you by night.”

“We are here and must go on,” said the child, boldly; for she saw that the old man listened with anxious ears to this account.

He showed them, then, by which road they must leave the town, and what course they should hold when they had gained it. He lingered so long on these instructions that the child, with a fervent blessing, tore herself away, and stayed to hear no more.

But, before they had reached the corner of the lane, the man came running after them, and, pressing her hand, left something in it—two old, battered, smoke-incrusted penny pieces.

In all their journeying they had never longed so ardently, they had never so pined and wearied, for the freedom of pure air and open country as now. “Two days and nights!” thought the child. “He said two days and nights we should have to spend among such scenes as these. Oh! if we live to reach the country once again; if we get clear of these dreadful places, though it is only to lie down and die, with what a grateful heart I shall thank God for so much mercy!”

The child walked with more difficulty than she had led her companion to expect, for the pains that racked her joints were of no common severity, and every exertion increased them. But they wrung from her no complaint or look of suffering, and, though the two travelers proceeded very slowly, they did proceed. Clearing the town in course of time, they began to feel that they were fairly on their way.

On every side, and as far as the eye could see into the heavy distance, tall chimneys, crowding on one another, and presenting that endless repetition of the same dull, ugly form which is the horror of oppressive dreams, poured out their plague of smoke, obscured the light, and made foul the melancholy air.

But night-time came in this dreadful spot!—night, which, unlike the night that Heaven sends on earth, brought with it no peace, nor quiet, nor signs of blessed sleep—who shall tell the terrors of the night to the young, wandering child?

And yet she lay down, with nothing between her and the sky; and with no fear for herself, for she was past it now, put up a prayer for the poor old man. So very weak and spent, she felt, so very calm and unresisting, that she had no thought of any wants of her own, but prayed that God would raise up some friend for *him*.

A penny loaf was all they had had that day. It was very little, but even hunger was forgotten in the strange tranquillity that crept over her senses. She lay down very gently, and, with a quiet smile upon her face, fell into a slumber. It was not like sleep—and yet it must have been, or why those pleasant dreams of the little scholar all night long?

Morning came. Much weaker, diminished powers even of sight and hearing, and yet the child made no complaint—perhaps would have made none, even if she had not had that inducement to be silent, traveling by her side. A loathing of food that she was not conscious of until they expended their last penny in the purchase of another loaf, prevented her par-

taking even of this poor repast. Her grandfather eat greedily, which she was glad to see.

Their way lay through the same scenes as yesterday, with no variety or improvement. With less and less of hope or strength, but with an undiminished resolution not to betray by any word or sign her sinking state so long as she had energy to move, the child, throughout the remainder of that day, compelled herself to proceed; not even stopping to rest as frequently as usual. Evening was drawing on, but had not closed in, when they came to a busy town.

Faint and spiritless as they were, its streets were insupportable. After humbly asking for relief at some few doors, and being repulsed, they agreed to make their way out of it as speedily as they could, and try if the inmates of any lone house beyond would have more pity on their exhausted state.

They were dragging themselves along through the last street, and the child felt that the time was close at hand when her enfeebled powers would bear no more. There appeared before them, at this point, going in the same direction as themselves, a traveler on foot, who, with a portmanteau strapped to his back, leaned upon a stout stick as he walked, and read from a book which he held in his other hand.

It was not an easy matter to come up with him, and beseech his aid, for he walked fast, and was a little distance in advance. At length he stopped to look more attentively at some passage in his book. Animated with a ray of hope, the child shot on before her grandfather, and going close to the stranger without rousing him by the sound of her footsteps, began, in a few faint words, to implore his help.

He turned his head. The child clapped her hands together, uttered a wild shriek, and fell senseless at his feet.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

IT was the poor school-master. No other than the poor school-master. Scarcely less moved and surprised by the sight of the child than she had been on recognizing him, he stood, for a moment, silent, without even the presence of mind to raise her from the ground.

But, quickly recovering his self-possession, he threw down his stick and book, and dropping on one knee beside her, endeavored, by such simple means as occurred to him, to restore her to herself; while her grandfather, standing idly by, wrung his hands, and implored her with many endearing expressions to speak to him, were it only a word.

"She is quite exhausted," said the school-master, glancing upward into his face. "You have taxed her powers too far, friend."

"She is perishing of want," rejoined the old man. "I never thought how weak and ill she was till now."

Casting a look upon him, half reproachful and half compassionate, the school-master took the child in his arms, and, bidding the old man gather up her little basket, and follow him directly, bore her away at his utmost speed.

There was a small inn within sight, to which, it would seem, he had been directing his steps when so unexpectedly overtaken. Toward this place he hurried with his unconscious burden, and rushing into the kitchen, and calling upon the company there assembled to make way for God's sake, deposited it on a chair before the fire.

The landlady soon came running in, with a little hot brandy and water, followed by her servant-girl, carrying vinegar, smelling-salts, and such other restoratives; which, being duly administered, recovered the child so far as to enable her to thank them in a faint voice, and to extend her hand to the

poor school-master, who stood, with an anxious face, hard by. Without suffering her to speak another word, or so much as to stir a finger any more, the women straightway carried her off to bed; and, having covered her up warm, bathed her cold feet, and wrapped them in flannel, they dispatched a messenger for the doctor.

The doctor arrived with all speed, and taking his seat by the bedside of poor Nell, drew out his watch and felt her pulse. Then he looked at her tongue, then he felt her pulse again, and while he did so he eyed the half-emptied wine-glass.

"I should give her," said the doctor at length, "a teaspoonful, every now and then, of hot brandy and water."

"Why, that's exactly what we've done, sir!" said the delighted landlady.

"I should also," observed the doctor, who had passed the foot-bath on the stairs, "I should also," said the doctor, "put her feet in hot water, and wrap them up in flannel. I should likewise," said the doctor with increased solemnity, "give her something light for supper—the wing of a roasted fowl now—"

"Why, goodness gracious me, sir! it's cooking at the kitchen fire this instant," cried the landlady. And so indeed it was, for the school-master had ordered it to be put down, and it was getting on so well that the doctor might have smelled it if he had tried.

While her supper was preparing, the child fell into a refreshing sleep, from which they were obliged to arouse her when it was ready. As she evinced extraordinary uneasiness on learning that her grandfather was below-stairs, and as she was greatly troubled at the thought of their being apart, he took his supper with her. Finding her still very restless on this head, they made him up a bed in an inner room, to which he presently retired. The key of this chamber happened by good fortune to be on that side of the door which was in Nell's

room; she turned it on him when the landlady had withdrawn, and crept to bed again with a thankful heart.

The report in the morning was, that the child was better, but was extremely weak, and would at least require a day's rest, and careful nursing, before she could proceed upon her journey. The school-master received this communication with perfect cheerfulness, observing that he had a day to spare—two days, for that matter—and could very well afford to wait. As the patient was to sit up in the evening, he appointed to visit her in her room at a certain hour, and rambling out with his book, did not return until the hour arrived. Nell could not help weeping when they were left alone.

"It makes me unhappy even in the midst of all this kindness," said the child, "to think that we should be a burden upon you. How can I ever thank you? If I had not met you, I must have died, and he would have been left alone."

"We'll not talk about dying," said the school-master; "and as to burdens, I have made my fortune since you slept at my cottage."

"Indeed!" cried the child, joyfully.

"Oh, yes," returned her friend. "I have been appointed clerk and school-master to a village a long way from here—and a long way from the old one, as you may suppose—at five-and-thirty pounds a year. Five-and-thirty pounds!"

"I am very glad," said the child—"so very, very glad."

"I am on my way there now," resumed the school-master. "They allowed me the stage-coach hire—outside stage-coach hire all the way. Bless you, they grudge me nothing. But as the time at which I am expected there left me ample leisure, I determined to walk instead. How glad I am, to think I did so!"

"How glad should we be!"

"Yes, yes," said the school-master, moving restlessly in his chair; "certainly, that's very true. But you—where are you going, where are you coming from, what have you been doing

since you left me, what had you been doing before? Now tell me—do tell me. I have a reason for loving you. I have felt since that time as if my love for him who died had been transferred to you who stood beside his bed.”

The plain, frank kindness of the honest school-master, the affectionate earnestness of his speech and manner, the truth which was stamped upon his every word and look, gave the child a confidence in him. She told him all—that they had no friend or relative—that she had fled with the old man, to save him from a mad-house and all the miseries he dreaded—that she was flying now to save him from himself—and that she sought an asylum¹ in some remote place, where the temptation before which he fell would never enter, and her late sorrows and distresses could have no place.

The school-master heard her with astonishment. “This child!” he thought. “Has this child heroically persevered under all doubts and dangers, struggled with poverty and suffering, upheld and sustained by strong affection and the consciousness of rectitude alone? And yet the world is full of such heroism.”

What more he thought or said, matters not. It was concluded that Nell and her grandfather should accompany him to the village whither he was bound, and that he should endeavor to find them some humble occupation by which they could subsist. “We shall be sure to succeed,” said the school-master, heartily. “The cause is too good a one to fail.”

They arranged to proceed upon their journey next evening, as a stage-wagon, which traveled for some distance on the same road as they must take, would stop at the inn to change horses, and the driver for a small gratuity² would give Nell a place inside. A bargain was soon struck when the wagon came; and in due time it rolled away, with the child comfortably bestowed among the softer packages, her grandfather and the school-master walking on beside the driver, and the landlady and all

¹ a place of retreat and security.

² gift.

the good folks of the inn screaming out their good wishes and farewells.

What a delicious journey was that journey in the wagon! Sometimes walking for a mile or two while her grandfather rode inside, and sometimes even prevailing upon the school-master to take her place and lie down to rest, Nell traveled on very happily until they came to a large town, where the wagon stopped, and where they spent a night. When they had passed through this town, they entered again upon the country, and began to draw near their place of destination.

It was not so near, however, but that they spent another night upon the road; not that their doing so was quite an act of necessity, but that the school-master, when they approached within a few miles of his village, had a fidgety sense of his dignity as the new clerk, and was unwilling to make his entry in dusty shoes and travel-disordered dress. It was a fine, clear autumn morning when they came upon the scene of his promotion and stopped to contemplate its beauties.

"See—here's the church!" cried the delighted school-master, in a low voice; "and that old building close beside it is the school-house, I'll be sworn! Five-and-thirty pounds a year in this beautiful place!"

They admired everything—the old gray porch, the ancient tower, the weather-cock, the brown-thatched roofs of cottage, barn, and homestead, peeping from among the trees; the stream that rippled by the distant water-mill. It was for such a spot the child had wearied. Upon her bed of ashes, and amid the squalid horrors through which they had forced their way, visions of such scenes—beautiful indeed, but not more beautiful than this sweet reality—had been always present to her mind.

"I must leave you somewhere for a few minutes," said the school-master, at length breaking the silence into which they had fallen in their gladness. "I have a letter to present and inquiries to make, you know. Where shall I take you? To the little inn yonder?"

"Let us wait here," rejoined Nell. "The gate is open. We will sit in the church porch till you come back."

"A good place, too," said the school-master, leading the way toward it, disencumbering himself of his portmanteau, and placing it on the stone seat. "Be sure that I come back with good news, and am not long gone."

So the happy school-master put on a brand-new pair of gloves, which he had carried in a little parcel in his pocket all the way, and hurried off, full of ardor and excitement.

CHAPTER XVII.

A HOME AT LAST.

AFTER a long time the school-master appeared at the gate of the church-yard, and hurried toward them, jingling in his hand, as he came along, a bundle of rusty keys. He was quite breathless with pleasure and haste, when he reached the porch, and at first could only point toward the old building which the child had been contemplating so earnestly.

"You see those two old houses?" he said at last.

"Yes, surely," replied Nell. "I have been looking at them nearly all the time you have been away."

"And you would have looked at them more curiously yet, if you could have guessed what I have to tell you," said her friend. "One of those houses is mine."

Without saying any more, or giving the child time to reply, the school-master took her hand, and led her to the place of which he spoke.

They stopped before its low, arched door. After trying several of the keys in vain, the school-master found one to fit the huge lock, which turned back, creaking, and admitted them into the house.

The room into which they entered was a vaulted chamber, once nobly ornamented by cunning architects, and still retain-

ing in its beautiful groined roof and rich stone tracery choice remnants of its ancient splendor. Foliage carved in the stone yet remained to tell how many times the leaves outside had come and gone, while it lived on unchanged. The broken figures supporting the chimney-piece were still distinguishable for what they had been, and showed sadly by the empty hearth, like creatures who had outlived their kind, and mourned their own too slow decay.

In some old time—for even change was old in that old place—a wooden partition had been constructed in one part of the chamber to form a sleeping-closet into which the light was admitted at the same period by a rude window, or rather niche, cut in the solid wall. This screen, together with two seats in the broad chimney, had at some forgotten date been part of the church or convent; for the oak, hastily appropriated to its present purpose, had been little altered from its former shape, and presented to the eye a pile of fragments of rich carving.

An open door leading to a small room, dim with the light that came through leaves of ivy, completed the interior of this portion of the ruin. It was not quite destitute of furniture. A few strange chairs, whose arms and legs looked as though they had dwindled away with age; a table, a great old chest that had once held records in the church, with other quaintly fashioned domestic necessities, and store of fire-wood for the winter, were scattered around, and gave evident tokens of its occupation as a dwelling-place at no very distant time.

“It is a very beautiful place!” said the child in a low voice.

“A peaceful place to live in, don’t you think so?” said her friend.

“Oh, yes,” rejoined the child, “a quiet, happy place—a place to live and learn to die in!”

“A place to live and learn to live, and gather health of mind and body in,” said the school-master; “for this old house is yours.”

"Ours!" cried the child.

"Ay," returned the school-master, gayly, "for many a merry year to come, I shall be a close neighbor—only next door—but this house is yours."

Having now disburdened himself of his great surprise, the school-master sat down, and drawing Nell to his side, told her he had learned that that ancient tenement¹ had been occupied for a very long time by an old person, nearly a hundred years of age, who kept the keys of the church, opened and closed it for the service, and showed it to strangers; that she had died not many weeks ago, and nobody had yet been found to fill the office. Learning all this in an interview with the sexton, who was confined to his bed by rheumatism, he had been bold to make mention of his fellow-traveler, which had been so favorably received by that high authority, that he had taken courage, acting on his advice, to propound the matter to the clergyman. In a word, the result of his exertions was, that Nell and her grandfather were to be carried before the clergyman next day; and, his approval of their conduct and appearance reserved as a matter of form, that they were already appointed to the vacant post.

"There's a small allowance of money," said the school-master. "It is not much, but still enough to live upon in this retired spot. By clubbing our funds together, we shall do bravely; no fear of that."

"Heaven bless and prosper you!" sobbed the child.

"Amen, my dear," returned her friend, cheerfully; "and all of us, as it will, and has, in leading us through sorrow and trouble to this tranquil life. But we must look at *my* house now. Come!"

They repaired to the other tenement; tried the rusty keys as before; at length found the right one, and opened the worm-eaten door. It led into a chamber vaulted and old, like that from which they had come, but not so spacious, and hav-

¹ house or abode.

ing only one other little room attached. Like the adjoining habitation, it held such old articles of furniture as were absolutely necessary, and had its stack of fire-wood.

To make these dwellings as habitable and full of comfort as they could, was now their pleasant care. In a short time each had its cheerful fire glowing and crackling on the hearth, and reddening the pale old wall with a hale and healthy blush. Nell, busily plying her needle, repaired the tattered window-hangings, drew together the rents that time had worn in the threadbare scraps of carpet, and made them whole and decent. The school-master swept and smoothed the ground before the door, trimmed the long grass, trained the ivy and creeping plants which hung their drooping heads in melancholy neglect, and gave to the outer walls a cheery air of home. The old man, sometimes by his side and sometimes with the child, lent his aid to both, went here and there on little patient services, and was happy. Neighbors, too, as they came from work, proffered their help, or sent their children with such small presents or loans as the strangers needed most. It was a busy day; and night came on, and found them wondering that there was yet so much to do, and that it should be dark so soon.

They took their supper together in the house which may be henceforth called the child's; and, when they had finished their meal, drew around the fire, and almost in whispers—their hearts were too quiet and glad for loud expression—discussed their future plans. Before they separated, the school-master read some prayers aloud; and then full of gratitude and happiness, they parted for the night.

With the brightness and joy of morning came the renewal of yesterday's labors. They worked gayly in ordering and arranging their houses until noon, and then went to visit the clergyman.

He was a simple-hearted old gentleman, accustomed to retirement and very little acquainted with the world, which he

had left many years before to come and settle in that place. His wife had died in the house in which he still lived, and he had long since lost sight of any earthly cares or hopes beyond it.

He received them very kindly, and at once showed an interest in Nell; asking her name, and age, her birth-place, the circumstances which had led her there, and so forth. The school-master had already told her story. They had no other friends or home to leave, he said, and had come to share his fortunes. He loved the child as though she were his own.

"Well, well," said the clergyman. "Let it be as you desire. She is very young."

"Old in adversity and trial, sir," replied the school-master.

"God help her! Let her rest and forget them," said the old gentleman. "But an old church is a dull and gloomy place for one so young as you, my child."

"Oh, no, sir," returned Nell. "I have no such thoughts, indeed."

"I would rather see her dancing on the green at nights," said the old gentleman, laying his hand upon her head and smiling sadly, "than have her sitting in the shadow of our moldering arches."

After more kind words, they withdrew, and repaired to the child's house, where they were yet in conversation on the happy fortune, when another friend appeared.

This was a little old gentleman who lived in the parsonage house, and had resided there ever since the death of the clergyman's wife, which had happened fifteen years before. He had been his college friend and always his close companion; in the first shock of his grief he had come to console and comfort him; and from that time they had never parted company. The little old gentleman was the active spirit of the place, the adjuster of all differences, the promoter of all merry-makings, the dispenser of his friend's bounty, and of no small charity of his own besides; the universal mediator, comforter and friend. None of the simple villagers had cared to ask his

name, or, when they knew it, to store it in their memory. Perhaps because he was an unmarried, unencumbered gentleman he had been called the bachelor. The name pleased him, or suited him as well as any other, and the bachelor he had ever since remained. And the bachelor it was, it may be added, who with his own hands had laid in the stock of fuel which the wanderers had found in their new habitation.

The bachelor, then, lifted the latch, showed his little round, mild face for a moment at the door, and stepped into the room like one who was no stranger to it.

"You are Mr. Marton, the new school-master?" he said, greeting Nell's kind friend.

"I am, sir."

"You come well recommended, and I am glad to see you. This is our young church-keeper? You are not the less welcome, friend, for her sake, or for this old man's; nor the worse teacher for having learned humanity."

"She has been ill, sir, very lately," said the school-master, in answer to the look with which their visitor regarded Nell when he had kissed her cheek.

"Yes, yes, I know she has," he rejoined. "There have been suffering and heartache here."

"Indeed there have, sir."

The little old gentleman glanced at the grandfather and back again at the child, whose hand he took tenderly in his, and held.

"You will be happier here," he said; "we will try, at least, to make you so. You have made great improvements here already. Are they the work of your hands?"

"Yes, sir."

"We may make some others—not better in themselves, but with better means, perhaps," said the bachelor. "Let us see now, let us see."

Nell accompanied him into the other little rooms and over both the houses, in which he found various small comforts

wanting, which he engaged to supply from a certain collection of odds and ends he had at home. They all came, and came without loss of time; for the little old gentleman, disappearing for some five or ten minutes, presently returned, laden with old shelves, rugs, blankets, and other household gear, and followed by a boy bearing a similar load. These being cast on the floor in a promiscuous heap, yielded a quantity of occupation in arranging, erecting, and putting away; the superintendence of which task evidently afforded the old gentleman extreme delight, and engaged him for some time with great briskness and activity.

CHAPTER XVIII.

NELL'S GARDEN.

NELL was stirring early in the morning, and having discharged her household tasks, and put everything in order for the good school-master, took down, from its nail by the fire-side, a little bundle of keys with which the bachelor had formally invested her on the previous day, and went out alone to visit the old church.

Some young children sported among the tombs, and hid from one another with laughing faces. They had an infant with them, and had laid it down asleep upon a child's grave, in a little bed of leaves. She drew near, and asked one of them whose grave it was. The child answered that that was not its name; it was a garden—his brother's. It was greener, he said, than all the other gardens, and the birds loved it better because he had been used to feed them.

She passed the church, gazing upward at its old tower, went through the wicket gate, and so into the village. The old sexton, leaning on a crutch, was taking the air at his cottage door, and gave her a good-morrow.

"You are better?" said the child, stopping to speak with him.

"Ay, surely," returned the old man. "I'm thankful to say, much better. But come in, come in."

The old man limped on before, and warning her of the downward step, which he achieved himself with no small difficulty, led the way into his little cottage.

"Are you very old?" asked the child, involuntarily.

"I shall be seventy-nine next summer."

"You still work when you are well?"

"Work? To be sure. You shall see my gardens hereabout. Look at the window there. I made, and have kept, that plot of ground entirely with my own hands. By this time next year I shall hardly see the sky, the boughs will have grown so thick. I have my winter work at night besides."

He opened, as he spoke, a cupboard close to where he sat, and produced some miniature boxes, carved in a homely manner and made of old wood.

The child admired and praised his work, and leaving the old sexton shortly afterward, she reached the church. It was easy to find the key belonging to the outer door, for each was labeled on a scrap of yellow parchment. Its very turning in the lock awoke a hollow sound, and when she entered with faltering step, the echoes that it raised in closing made her start.

Some part of the edifice had been a chapel, and here were effigies of warriors stretched upon their beds of stone with folded hands, girded with their swords, and cased in armor as they had lived. Some of these knights had their own weapons, helmets, coats of mail, hanging upon the walls hard by, and dangling from rusty hooks.

The child sat down among the figures on the tombs, and gazing around with a feeling of awe, tempered with a calm delight, felt now that she was happy and at rest. She took a Bible from the shelf, and read; then, laying it down, thought of the summer days and the bright spring-time that would come—of the leaves that would flutter at the window—of the

songs of birds and growth of buds and blossom out-of-doors—of the sweet air that would steal in, and gently wave the tattered banners overhead.

She left the chapel—very slowly and often turning back to gaze again—and coming to a low door, which led into the tower, opened it, and climbed the winding stair in darkness; save when she looked down, through narrow loop-holes, on the place she had left, or caught a glimmering vision of the dusty bell. At length she gained the end of the ascent and stood upon the turret top.

Oh! the glory of the sudden burst of light; the freshness of the fields and woods, stretching away on every side, and meeting the bright blue sky; the cattle grazing in the pasturage; the smoke, that, coming from among the trees, seemed to rise upward from the green earth; everything, so beautiful and happy! It was like passing from death to life; it was drawing nearer Heaven.

The children were gone, when she emerged into the porch, and locked the door. As she passed the school-house she could hear the busy hum of voices. Her friend had begun his labors. The noise grew louder, and looking back, she saw the boys come trooping out and disperse themselves with merry shouts and play. "It's a good thing," thought the child; "I am very glad they pass the church." And then she stopped, to fancy how the noise would sound inside, and how gently it would seem to die away upon the ear.

Again that day, yes, twice again, she stole back to the old chapel. They found her there at last, and took her home. She looked pale but very happy, until they separated for the night; and then, as the school-master stooped down to kiss her cheek, he thought he felt a tear upon his face.

The old sexton soon got better, and was about again. From him the child learned many things. He was not able to work, but one day there was a grave to be made, and he came to overlook the man who dug it. He was in a talkative mood, and

the child, at first standing by his side, and afterward sitting on the grass at his feet, with her thoughtful face raised toward his, began to converse with him.

"You were telling me," she said, "about your gardening. Do you ever plant things here?"

"In the church-yard?" returned the sexton. "Not I."

"I have seen some flowers and little shrubs about," the child rejoined; "there are some over there, you see. I thought they were of your rearing, though indeed they grow but poorly."

"They grow as Heaven wills," said the old man, "and it kindly ordains that they shall never flourish here."

"I don't understand you."

"Why, this is it," said the sexton. "They mark the graves of those who had very tender, loving friends."

"I was sure they did!" the child exclaimed. "I am very glad to know they do."

"Ay," returned the old man; "but stay. Look at them. See how they hang their heads, and droop, and wither. Do you guess the reason?"

"No," the child replied.

"Because the memory of those who lie below passes away so soon. At first they tend them, morning, noon, and night; they soon begin to come less frequently, from once a day to once a week; from once a week to once a month; then not at all. Such tokens seldom flourish long. I have known the briefest summer flowers outlive them."

"I grieve to hear it. Perhaps the mourners learn to look to the blue sky by day, and to the stars by night, and to think that the dead are there, and not in the graves," said the child in an earnest voice.

"Perhaps so," replied the old man, doubtfully. "It may be."

"Whether it be as I believe it is or no," thought the child within herself, "I'll make this place *my* garden. It will

be no harm at least to work here day by day, and pleasant thoughts will come of it, I am sure."

The child remained for some minutes watching the grave-digger as he threw out the earth with his shovel. At length she turned away, and walking thoughtlessly through the church-yard, came unexpectedly upon the school-master, who was sitting on a green grave in the sun, reading.

"Nell here?" he said, cheerfully, as he closed his book. "It does me good to see you in the air and light. I feared you were again in the church, where you so often are."

"Feared!" replied the child, sitting down beside him. "Is it not a good place?"

"Yes, yes," said the school-master. "But you must be gay sometimes—nay, don't shake your head and smile so sadly."

"Not sadly, if you knew my heart. Do not look at me as if you thought me sorrowful. There is not a happier creature on earth than I am now."

Full of grateful tenderness, the child took his hand and folded it between her own. "It's God's will!" she said, when they had been silent for some time.

"What?"

"All this," she rejoined—"all this about us. But which of us is sad now? You see that *I* am smiling."

"And so am I," said the school-master; "smiling to think how often we shall laugh in this same place. Were you not talking yonder?"

"Yes," the child rejoined.

"Of something that has made you sorrowful?"

There was a long pause.

"What was it?" said the school-master, tenderly. "Come, tell me what it was."

"I rather grieve—I *do* rather grieve to think," said the child, bursting into tears, "that those who die about us are so soon forgotten."

"And do you think," said the school-master, marking the glance she had thrown around, "that an unvisited grave, a withered tree, a faded flower or two, are tokens of forgetfulness or cold neglect? Do you think there are no deeds, far away from here, in which these dead may be best remembered?"

"Tell me no more," said the child, quickly. "I feel, I know it. How could I be unmindful of it, when I thought of you?"

"There is nothing," cried her friend, "nothing innocent or good, that dies, and is forgotten. An infant, a prattling child, dying in its cradle, will live again in the better thoughts of those who loved it. There is not an angel added to the host of Heaven but does its blessed work on earth in those that loved it here. Forgotten! oh, if the good deeds of human creatures could be traced to their source, how beautiful would even death appear; for how much charity, mercy, and purified affection would be seen to have their growth in dusty graves!"

"Yes," said the child, "it is the truth; I know it is. Who should feel its force so much as I, in whom your little scholar lives again! Dear, dear, good friend, if you knew the comfort you have given me!"

The poor school-master made her no answer, but bent over her in silence, for his heart was full.

They were yet seated in the same place, when the grandfather approached. Before they had spoken many words together, the church clock struck the hour of school, and their friend withdrew.

"A good man," said the grandfather, looking after him; "a kind man. Surely *he* will never harm us, Nell. We are safe here at last, eh? We will never go away from here?"

The child shook her head and smiled.

"She needs rest," said the old man, patting her cheek; "too pale—too pale! She is not like what she was."

"When?" asked the child.

"Ha!" said the old man, "to be sure—when? How many

weeks ago? Could I count them on my fingers? Let them rest, though; they're better gone."

"Thank Heaven!" inwardly exclaimed the child, "for this most happy change!"

"I will be patient," said the old man, "humble, very thankful, and obedient, if you let me stay. But do not hide from me; do not steal away alone; let me keep beside you. Indeed, I will be very true and faithful, Nell."

"I steal away alone! Why, that," replied the child, with assumed gayety, "would be a pleasant jest indeed. See here, dear grandfather, we'll make this place our garden—why not? It is a very good one—and to-morrow we'll begin, and work together, side by side."

"It is a brave thought!" cried her grandfather. "Mind, darling, we begin to-morrow."

Who so delighted as the old man, when they next day began their labor? They plucked the long grass and nettles from the tombs, thinned the poor shrubs and roots, made the turf smooth, and cleared it of the leaves and weeds. They were yet in the ardor of their work, when the child, raising her head from the ground over which she bent, observed that the bachelor was sitting on the stile close by, watching them in silence.

"A kind office," said the little gentleman, nodding to Nell as she courtesied to him. "Have you done all that this morning?"

"It is very little, sir," returned the child with downcast eyes, "to what we mean to do."

"Good work, good work," said the bachelor. "But do you labor only at the graves of children and young people?"

"We shall come to the others in good time, sir," replied Nell.

It was a slight incident, and might have been design or accident, or the child's unconscious sympathy with youth. But it seemed to strike upon her grandfather, though he had not

noticed it before. He looked in a hurried manner at the graves, then anxiously at the child, then pressed her to his side, and bade her stop to rest. Something he had long forgotten appeared to struggle faintly in his mind. It did not pass away as weightier things had done; but came uppermost again, and yet again, and many times that day, and often afterward.

CHAPTER XIX.

DON'T LEAVE US, NELL.

FROM that time there sprung up in the old man's mind a solicitude about the child which never slept or left him. From that time the old man never, for a moment, forgot the weakness and devotion of the child; from the time of that slight incident, he who had seen her toiling by his side through so much difficulty and suffering, and had scarcely thought of her otherwise than as the partner of miseries which he felt severely in his own person, and deplored for his own sake at least as much as hers, awoke to a sense of what he owed her, and what those miseries had made her. Never, no, never once, in one unguarded moment from that time to the end, did any care for himself, any thought of his own comfort, any selfish consideration or regard distract his thoughts from the gentle object of his love.

He would follow her up and down, waiting till she should tire and lean upon his arm—he would sit opposite to her in the chimney-corner content to watch and look, until she raised her head and smiled upon him as of old—he would discharge by stealth those household duties which tasked her powers too heavily—he would rise, in the cold dark nights, to listen to her breathing in her sleep, and sometimes crouch for hours by her bedside only to touch her hand.

Sometimes—weeks had crept on then—the child, exhausted, though with little fatigue, would pass whole evenings on a

couch beside the fire. At such times the school-master would bring in books and read them to her aloud; and seldom an evening passed but the bachelor came in and took his turn of reading. The old man sat and listened—with little understanding for the words, but with his eyes fixed upon the child—and if she smiled or brightened with the story, he would say it was a good one, and conceive a fondness for the very book. When in their evening talk the bachelor told some tale that pleased her, the old man would painfully try to store it in his mind; nay, when the bachelor left them he would sometimes slip out after him, and humbly beg that he would tell him such a part again, that he might learn to win a smile from Nell.

But these were rare occasions, happily; for the child yearned to be out-of-doors, and walking in her solemn garden. Parties, too, would come to see the church; and those who came, speaking to others of the child, sent more; so even at that season of the year they had visitors almost daily. The old man would follow them at a little distance through the building, listening to the voice he loved so well; and when the strangers left, and parted from Nell, he would mingle with them to catch up fragments of their conversation; or he would stand for the same purpose, with his gray head uncovered, at the gate as they passed through.

They always praised the child, her sense and beauty, and he was proud to hear them. But what was that, so often added, which wrung his heart and made him sob and weep alone in some dull corner! Alas! even careless strangers—they who had no feeling for her, but the interest of the moment—they who would go away and forget next week that such a being lived—even they saw it—even they pitied her—even they bade him good-day compassionately, and whispered as they passed.

The people of the village, too, of whom there was not one but grew to have a fondness for poor Nell, even among them there was the same feeling; a tenderness toward her—a com-

passionate regard for her, increasing every day. The very school-boys, light-hearted and thoughtless as they were, even they cared for her. The roughest among them was sorry if he missed her in the usual place upon his way to school, and would turn out of the path to ask for her at the window. If she were sitting in the church, they perhaps might peep in softly at the open door; but they never spoke to her, unless she rose and went to speak to them. Some feeling was abroad which raised the child above them all.

She had sought out the young children whom she first saw playing in the church-yard. One of these was her little favorite and friend, and often sat by her side in the church, or climbed with her to the tower-top. It was his delight to help her, or to fancy that he did so, and they soon became close companions.

It happened that, as she was reading in the old spot by herself one day, this child came running in with his eyes full of tears, and after holding her from him, and looking at her eagerly for a moment, clasped his little arms passionately about her neck.

"What now?" said Nell, soothing him. "What is the matter?"

"She is not one yet!" cried the boy, embracing her still more closely. "No, no, not yet."

She looked at him wonderingly, and putting his hair back from his face and kissing him, asked what he meant.

"You must not be one, dear Nell," cried the boy. "We can't see them. They never come to play with us, or talk to us. Be what you are. You are better so."

"I do not understand you," said the child. "Tell me what you mean."

"Why, they say," replied the boy, looking up into her face, "that you will be an angel before the birds sing again. But you won't be, will you? Don't leave us, Nell, though the sky is bright. Do not leave us."

The child dropped her head, and put her hands before her face.

"She cannot bear the thought!" cried the boy, exulting through his tears. "You will not go. You know how sorry we should be. Dear Nell, tell me that you'll stay among us. Oh! pray, pray, tell me that you will."

The little creature folded his hands, and knelt down at her feet.

"Only look at me, Nell," said the boy, "and tell me that you'll stop, and then I shall know that they are wrong, and will cry no more. Won't you say yes, Nell?"

The child suffered him to move her hands and put them around his neck. There was a fearful silence, but it was not long before she looked upon him with a smile, and promised him, in a very gentle, quiet voice, that she would stay, and be his friend as long as Heaven would let her. He clapped his hands for joy, and thanked her many times; and being charged to tell no person what had passed between them, gave her an earnest promise that he never would.

CHAPTER XX.

A GOOD AND HAPPY SLEEP.

THE dull, red glow of a wood-fire showed a figure, seated on the hearth, bending over the fitful light. The attitude was that of one who sought the heat. It was, and yet was not. The stooping posture and the towering form were there, but no hands were stretched out to meet the grateful warmth, no shrug or shiver compared its luxury with the piercing cold outside. With limbs huddled together, head bowed down, arms crossed upon the breast, and fingers tightly clinched, it rocked to and fro upon its seat without a moment's pause.

The door opened for the entrance of the school-master and the bachelor. The bachelor drew a chair toward the old man

and sat down close beside him. After a long silence he ventured to speak.

"Another night, and not in bed!" he said, softly. "I hoped you would be more mindful of your promise to me. Why do you not take some rest?"

"Sleep has left me," returned the old man. "It is all with her."

"It would pain her very much to know that you were watching thus," said the bachelor. "You would not give her pain?"

"I am not so sure of that, if it would only rouse her. She has slept so very long. And yet I am rash to say so. It is a good and happy sleep, eh?"

"Indeed it is," returned the bachelor. "Indeed, indeed it is."

"That's well. And the waking?" faltered the old man.

"Happy, too. Happier than tongue can tell or heart of man conceive."

They watched him as he rose and stole on tiptoe to the other chamber. They listened as he spoke again within its silent walls. He came back, whispering that she was still asleep, but that he thought she had moved. It was her hand, he said—a little—a very little; but he was pretty sure she had moved it—perhaps in seeking his. He had known her to do that before now, though in the deepest sleep the while. And when he had said this he dropped into his chair again, and clasping his hands above his head, uttered a cry never to be forgotten.

The poor school-master motioned to the bachelor that he would come on the other side, and speak to him. They gently unlocked his fingers, which he had twisted in his gray hair, and pressed them in their own.

"He will hear me," said the school-master, "I am sure. He will hear either me or you if we beseech him. She would, at all times."

"I will hear any voice she liked to hear," cried the old man. "I love all she loved."

"I know you do," returned the school-master. "I am certain of it. Think of her; think of all the sorrows and all the peaceful pleasures you have shared together."

"I do, I do. I think of nothing else."

"I would have you think of nothing else to-night—of nothing but those things which will soften your heart, dear friend, and open it to old affections and old times."

"You do well to speak softly," said the old man. "We will not wake her. There is a smile upon her young face now. We will not wake her."

"Let us not talk of her in her sleep, but as she used to be when you were journeying together far away—as she was at home in the old house from which you fled together—as she was in the old cheerful time," said the school-master.

"She was always cheerful—very cheerful," cried the old man, looking steadfastly at him. "There was ever something mild and quiet about her, I remember, from the first; but she was of a happy nature."

"We have heard you say," pursued the school-master, "that in this and in all goodness she was like her mother. You can think of and remember her?"

He maintained his steadfast look, but gave no answer.

"Or even one before her," said the bachelor. "It is many years ago, and affliction makes the time longer, but you have not forgotten her whose death contributed to make this child so dear to you, even before you knew her worth or could read her heart? Say that you could carry back your thoughts to very distant days—"

By little and little the old man had drawn back toward the inner chamber, while these words were spoken. He pointed there, as he replied, with trembling lips:

"You plot among you to wean my heart from her. You never will do that—never while I have life. She is all in all to me. It is too late to part us now."

Waving them off with his hand, and calling softly to her as

he went, he stole into the room. They who were left behind drew close together, and after a few whispered words followed him. They moved so gently that their footsteps made no noise; but there were sobs and sounds of grief and mourning.

For she was dead. There, upon her little bed, she lay at rest. The solemn stillness was no marvel now.

She was dead. No sleep so beautiful and calm, so free from trace of pain, so fair to look upon. She seemed a creature fresh from the hand of God, and waiting for the breath of life, not one who had lived and suffered death.

Her couch was dressed with, here and there, some winter berries and green leaves gathered in a spot she had been used to favor. "When I die, put near me something that has loved the light, and had the sky above it always." Those were her words.

She was dead. Dear, gentle, patient, noble Nell was dead. Her little bird—a poor, slight thing the pressure of a finger would have crushed—was stirring nimbly in its cage, and the strong heart of its child-mistress was mute and motionless forever.

Where were the traces of her early cares, her sufferings, and fatigues? All gone. Sorrow was dead indeed in her, but peace and perfect happiness were born; imaged in her tranquil beauty and profound repose.

And still her former self lay there, unaltered in this change. Yes. The old fireplace had smiled upon that same sweet face; it had passed, like a dream, through haunts of misery and care; at the door of the poor school-master on the summer evening, before the furnace-fire upon the cold wet night, at the still bedside of the dying boy, there had been the same mild, lovely look. So shall we know the angels in their majesty after death.

The old man held one languid arm in his, and had the small hand tightly folded to his breast, for warmth. It was the hand she had stretched out to him with her last smile—the

hand that had led him on, through all their wanderings. Ever and anon he pressed it to his lips; then hugged it to his breast again, murmuring that it was warmer now; and, as he said it, he looked, in agony, to those who stood around, as if imploring them to help her.

She was dead, and past all help, or need of it. The ancient rooms she had seemed to fill with life, even while her own was waning fast—the garden she had tended—the eyes she had gladdened—the noiseless haunts of many a thoughtful hour—the paths she had trodden, as it were, but yesterday—could know her never more.

“It is not,” said the school-master, as he bent down to kiss her on the cheek, and gave his tears free vent, “it is not on earth that Heaven’s justice ends. Think what earth is, compared with the world to which her young spirit has winged its early flight; and say, if one deliberate wish expressed in solemn terms above this bed could call her back to life, which of us would utter it!”

CHAPTER XXI.

AT REST TOGETHER.

WHEN morning came, and they could speak more calmly on the subject of their grief, they talked together about the close of her life.

They were all about her at the time, knowing that the end was drawing on. She died soon after daybreak. They had read and talked to her in the earlier portion of the night, but as the hours crept on she sunk to sleep. They could tell by what she faintly uttered in her dreams that they were of her journeyings with the old man; they were of no painful scenes, but of people who had helped and used them kindly, for she often said, “God bless you!” with great fervor. Waking, she never wandered in her mind but once, and that was of

beautiful music which she said was in the air. God knows. It may have been.

Opening her eyes at last, from a very quiet sleep, she begged that they would kiss her once again. That done, she turned to the old man with a lovely smile upon her face—such, they said, as they had never seen—and clung with both her arms about his neck. They did not know that she was dead at first.

She had never murmured or complained; but with a quiet mind, and manner quite unaltered—save that she every day became more earnest and more grateful to them—faded like the light upon a summer's evening.

The child who had been her little friend came there almost as soon as it was day with an offering of dried flowers which he begged them to lay upon her breast. He begged hard to see her, saying that he would be very quiet, and that they need not fear his being alarmed, for he had sat alone by his young brother all day long when *he* was dead, and had felt glad to be so near him. They let him have his wish, and indeed he kept his word, and was, in his childish way, a lesson to them all.

Up to that time the old man had not spoken once—except to her—or stirred from the bedside. But when he saw her little favorite, he was moved as they had not seen him yet, and made as though he would have him come nearer. Then, pointing to the bed, he burst into tears for the first time, and they who stood by, knowing that the sight of this child had done him good, left them alone together.

Soothing him with his artless talk of her, the child persuaded him to take some rest, to walk abroad, to do almost as he desired him. And when the day came on, which must remove her in her earthly shape from earthly eyes forever, he led him away, that he might not know when she was taken from him.

They were to gather fresh leaves and berries for her bed.

It was Sunday—a bright, clear, wintry afternoon—and as they traversed the village street, those who were walking in their path drew back to make way for them, and gave them a softened greeting.

“Neighbor,” said the old man, stopping at the cottage where his young guide’s mother dwelt, “how is it that the folks are nearly all in black to-day? I have seen a mourning ribbon or a piece of crape on almost every one.”

She could not tell, the woman said.

“Why, you yourself—you wear the color, too!” he said. “Windows are closed that never used to be by day. What does this mean?”

Again the woman said she could not tell.

“We must go back,” said the old man, hurriedly. “We must see what this is.”

“No, no,” cried the child, detaining him. “Remember what you promised. Our way is to the old green lane, where she and I so often were, and where you found us more than once making those garlands for her garden. Do not turn back.”

“Where is she now?” said the old man. “Tell me that.”

“Do you not know?” returned the child. “Did we not leave her but just now?”

“True, true! It *was* her we left—was it?”

He pressed his hand upon his brow, looked vacantly around, as if impelled by a sudden thought, crossed the road, and entered the sexton’s house. He and his assistant were sitting before the fire. Both rose up on seeing who it was.

The child made a hasty sign to them with his hand. It was the action of an instant, but that, and the old man’s look, were quite enough.

“Do you—do you bury any one to-day?” he said, eagerly.

“No, no. Who should we bury, sir?” returned the sexton. “It is a holiday with us, good sir. We have no work to do to-day.”

"Why, then, I'll go where you will," said the old man, turning to the child. "I am quite ready. Come, boy, come," and so submitted to be led away.

And now the bell—the bell she had so often heard, by night and day, and listened to with solemn pleasure almost as a living voice—rang its toll, for her, so young, so beautiful, so good. Decrepit age, and vigorous life, and blooming youth, and helpless infancy, poured forth—on crutches, in the pride of strength and health, in the full blush of promise, in the mere dawn of life—to gather round her tomb. Old men were there, whose eyes were dim and senses failing; grandmothers who might have died ten years ago, and still been old—the deaf, the blind, the lame—to see the closing of that early grave.

Along the crowded path they bore her now; pure as the new-fallen snow that covered it, whose day on earth had been as fleeting. Under the porch, where she had sat when Heaven in its mercy brought her to that peaceful spot, she passed again, and the old church received her in its quiet shade. They carried her to one old nook, where she had many and many a time sat musing, and laid their burden softly on the pavement.

Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust! Many a young hand dropped in its little wreath, many a stifled sob was heard. Some—and they were not a few—knelt down. All were sincere and truthful in their sorrow.

The service done, the mourners stood apart, and the villagers closed round to look into the grave before the pavement-stone should be replaced. They saw the vault covered, and the stone fixed down. Then when the dusk of evening had come on, and not a sound disturbed the sacred stillness of the place—when the bright moon poured in her light on tomb and monument, on pillar, wall, and arch, and most of all (it seemed to them) upon her quiet grave—in that calm time, when outward things and inward thoughts teem with assur-

ances of immortality, and worldly hopes and fears are humbled in the dust before them—then, with tranquil and submissive hearts, they turned away, and left the child with God.

It was late when the old man came home. The boy had led him to his own dwelling, under some pretense, on their way back; and, rendered drowsy by his long ramble and late want of rest, he had sunk into a deep sleep by the fireside. He was perfectly exhausted, and they were careful not to rouse him. The slumber held him a long time, and when he at length awoke the moon was shining.

They were waiting at the door for his coming, when he appeared in the pathway with his little guide. He repaired to her chamber, straight. Not finding what he had left there, he returned with distracted looks to the room in which they were. From that he rushed into the school-master's cottage, calling her name. They followed close upon him, and when he had vainly searched it, brought him home.

With such persuasive words as pity and affection could suggest, they prevailed upon him to sit and hear what they should tell him. Then, endeavoring by every little artifice to prepare his mind for what must come, and dwelling with many fervent words upon the happy lot to which she had been removed, they told him at last the truth. The moment it had passed their lips, he fell down among them like a murdered man.

For many hours they had little hope of his surviving; but grief is strong, and he recovered.

If there be any who have never known the blank that follows death—the weary void—the sense of desolation that will come upon the strongest minds, when something familiar and beloved is missed at every turn—the connection between inanimate and senseless things, and the object of recollection, when every household god becomes a monument, and every room a grave—if there be any who have not known this, and proved it by their own experience, they can never faintly guess how, for many days, the old man pined and moped away the time,

and wandered here and there as seeking something, and had no comfort.

The boy, to whom he had submitted at first, had no longer any influence with him. At times he would suffer the child to walk by his side, or would even take such notice of his presence as giving him his hand, or would stop to kiss his cheek, or pat him on the head. At other times he would entreat him—not unkindly—to be gone, and would not brook him near. But, whether alone or with friends, he was at all times the same—a broken-hearted man.

At length they found, one day, that he had risen early; and, with his knapsack on his back, his staff in hand, her own straw hat, and little basket full of such things as she had been used to carry, was gone. As they were making ready to pursue him far and wide, a frightened school-boy came who had seen him but a moment before sitting in the church—upon her grave, he said.

They hastened there, and going softly to the door, espied him in the attitude of one who waited patiently. They did not disturb him then, but kept a watch upon him all that day. When it grew quite dark, he rose and returned home, and went to bed, murmuring to himself: “She will come to-morrow!”

Upon the morrow he was there again from sunrise until night; and still at night he laid him down to rest, and murmured, “She will come to-morrow!”

And thenceforth, every day, and all day long, he waited at her grave for her. How many pictures of new journeys over pleasant country, of resting-places under the free, broad sky, of rambles in the fields and woods, and paths not often trodden—how many tones of that one well-remembered voice, how many glimpses of the form, the fluttering dress, the hair that waved so gayly in the wind—how many visions of what had been, and what he hoped was yet to be—rose up before him, in the old, dull, silent church! He never told them what he

thought, or where he went. He would sit with them at night, pondering with a secret satisfaction, they could see, upon the flight that he and she would take before night came again, and still they would hear him whisper in his prayers, "Lord, let her come to-morrow!"

The last time was on a genial day in spring. He did not return at the usual hour, and they went to seek him. He was lying dead upon the stone.

They laid him by the side of her whom he had loved so well, and, in the church where they had often prayed and mused, and lingered hand in hand, the child and the old man slept together.



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